

THE DISAPPEARING BUTCH:

Discursively Disciplining Queer Subjectivities

by

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Bachelor of Social Work, University of Victoria, 2009
Bachelor of Arts, Carleton University, 1996

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in the Faculty of Human and Social Development

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Our current social climate suggests that there is greater tolerance and acceptance of lesbians than ever before. There is evidence to suggest that gays and lesbians are becoming fully integrated into mainstream culture. Gay and lesbian characters are now regular media features with entire television shows such as *The L-Word* constructed around “lesbian” characters. Social acceptance of same sex sexual behavior has become such that celebrities such as Madonna and Britney Spears can kiss each other on national television to the titillation and amused delight of straight viewers. Perhaps the biggest indicator of increased acceptability of gays and lesbians is Canada's 2005 change in marriage laws, now granting marriage licenses to same sex couples.

Despite these seeming advances to gay and lesbian equality, I contend that rather than cause for celebration, these developments are simply a modern spin on an old tactic – a reformulated method of assimilating and “normalizing” lesbians. The greater acceptance afforded to lesbians today is at least in part, a result of media images that commodify lesbians as reproductions of Hollywood straight women. Within this context it seems that few lesbians today, and even fewer young lesbians self identify as butch. My hypothesis is that if lesbian feminism was the old threat to butch identity, the shunning of identity and the appeal of inclusivity within the neo-liberal, capitalist paradigm is perhaps the new. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis and a feminist methodology, this thesis analyses historical and contemporary discourses related to

lesbian subjectivity to explicate how butch identity is being made to disappear within North American lesbian communities.

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Acknowledgments

My gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Susan Strega for your thoughtful, insightful, detailed feedback and direction. You pushed me to think critically, to be transparent about how I know what I know, offered a great deal of encouragement, and believed I could do it (even when I had my doubts). Also, many thanks for going out of your way to accommodate a tight timeline and for sending me loads of resources and resource leads.

Thanks also to Dr. Heather Tapley and Dr. Donna Jeffery for agreeing to sit on my committee and for supporting my timely completion. Thanks especially to Donna for fostering an appreciation and an understanding of poststructural theory (despite some initial resistance on my part) and for encouraging an exploration of my relationship to subjectivity and identity.

To Sonia, who incited my earliest thinking about butch/femme, who entertained endless conversations on the topic of butch, generously offered research support and whose wisdom continually inspires and challenges me to think critically. Much love and gratitude for your support and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Emily who cooked for me, cleaned up after me, readily took second place to “the T word,” challenged me to explain my attachment to identity, and who patiently listened to my repetitive despairing lament, never wavering in saying “you can do it,” and “of course you’re going to finish it.” Your support, love and encouragement pulled me through. I love and adore you.

Dedication

In honour of all the brave, bold butches both living and dead whose defiant refusal to be “normal” makes bigger the meaning of female and whose very existence confronts the foundation of heteropatriarchy. Your pride in difference inspires mine. With much love, respect, and gratitude.

Chapter One: Introduction

Our current social climate suggests that there is greater tolerance and acceptance of lesbians than ever before. There is evidence to suggest that gays and lesbians are becoming fully integrated into mainstream culture. Gay and lesbian characters are now regular media features with entire television shows such as *The L-Word* constructed around “lesbian” characters. Social acceptance of same sex sexual behavior has become such that celebrities such as Madonna and Britney Spears can kiss each other on national television to the titillation and amused delight of straight viewers. Perhaps the biggest indicator of increased acceptability of gays and lesbians is Canada’s 2005 change in marriage laws, now granting marriage licenses to same sex couples.

Despite these seeming advances to gay and lesbian equality, I contend that rather than cause for celebration, these developments are simply a modern spin on an old tactic – a reformulated method of assimilating and “normalizing” lesbians. Normalization refers to dominant culture’s practice of bringing into line those who appear different from the norm. In this context, normalizing technologies are those strategies that aim to eradicate difference, essentially erasing lesbians by heteronormalizing us; in other words, making lesbians more akin to stereotypically heterosexual women.

Strategies of normalization include dominant discourses, which have historically tended towards narrow sexist, heterosexist and homophobic assumptions about lesbians (Allison, 1967; Caprio, 1954; Grahn, 1984; Lamos, 1994). Constructions of the working class “bull dyke” for example were intended to contemptuously represent all lesbians (Allison, 1967; Faderman, 1991; Grahn, 1984). Both derided and feared, the masculine female or “mannish” butch lesbian has long represented the quintessential lesbian in the minds of most North Americans.

Historically consumed by straight viewers as “entertaining freaks” (Nestle, 1992b, p. 139), dominant culture has always occupied a sort of distant horrified fascination with lesbians. More recently however a very specific lesbian has emerged and has begun to occupy a more primary role within popular culture. Unlike her “ugly/butch” and by extension working class predecessors (a connection which I later address), this new and improved lesbian has been recast as a style conscious, stereotypically beautiful socialite. Her success however relies on the deprecation of butch. Ironically conflating butch with 1970’s lesbian feminism (an odd marrying which I later take up), popular culture pits butch lesbians against contemporary lipstick lesbians, using the former to redeem the latter. As Hamer and Budge (1994) argue,

What seems to be happening, in popular culture’s romance with lesbianism, is the creation of a dualism; the bad political lesbian was anti-men and anti-fashion, versus the new brand of 1990’s lesbian, gorgeous, glamorous and, like any other good fashion accessory, devoid of any political meaning (p.11).

Indeed, the greater acceptance afforded to lesbians today is at least in part, a result of media images that commodify lesbians as reproductions of Hollywood straight women. Significantly, this heteronormative role model is constructed by race and class privileges such that looking and acting straight is analogous with Whiteness and upward mobility. Not only do such depictions erase most of us, they also erode lesbian culture while simultaneously appearing progressively unthreatening and benign “as [lesbian] representation is mistaken for political and social change” (Dow, 2001, p. 137). Moreover as Ciasullo (2001) astutely articulates,

Mainstream culture is thus giving with one hand and taking back with another: it makes room for positive representations of lesbianism, but the lesbian it chooses as ‘representative,’ decoupled from the butch that would more clearly signify lesbianism for

mainstream audiences, in effect becomes a nonlesbian, or, as Roseanne Kennedy puts it, an “absent presence” (p. 599-600).

Within this context it seems that few lesbians today, and even fewer young lesbians self identify as butch. My hypothesis is that if lesbian feminism was the old threat to butch identity, the shunning of identity and the appeal of inclusivity within the neo-liberal, capitalist paradigm is perhaps the new.

Using Foucauldian discourse analysis and a feminist methodology this thesis analyses historical and contemporary discourses related to lesbian subjectivity to explicate how butch identity is being made to disappear within North American lesbian communities. As a social work student engaged in examining technologies of normalization, I would be remiss to not acknowledge the role that social work has played in disciplining or “straightening out” queer subjectivities. This first chapter begins with a brief discussion of social work as a practice of normalization. Following this, I situate myself in relation to my research and to identity in particular. As a lesbian, femme and feminist I am deeply invested in butch identity. At the same time I also am greatly persuaded by poststructuralism and its emancipatory potential. This introductory chapter explores some of the tensions between poststructuralism, identity, subjectivity, and queer theory. I conclude this chapter by making clear who it is I am talking about in reference to butch and why I take a particular political position with regard to lesbian identities.

Consistent with Foucauldian theory, I have conducted a genealogical analysis in place of a traditional literature review. Foucault conceived that the conditions of the present are historically constructed by the power relations that precede it. Chapter Four attempts to unravel how the current conditions of butch existence have come to be. Unlike a standard historical

analysis, my genealogy chapter begins in the present and works backwards tracing the existence of butch to the 1940s. Chapter Four also examines the significance of butch to lesbian communities and to society more generally. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) IV-TR* is considered the leading authority on mental illness. Because my data analysis examines the ways in which the *DSM IV-TR* diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) disappears butch, my genealogy chapter also includes a brief history examining the relationship of GID and the former *DSM* diagnostic category Homosexuality to lesbian subjectivity. I conclude my genealogy chapter by presenting my genealogical observations about the conditions that gave rise to hegemonic and subjugated discourses constructing butch subjectivity.

In contrast to standard theses, Chapter Two - Methodology precedes my genealogy. This is because genealogy is itself a type of methodology. Here I situate my work within a Foucauldian analysis and provide a foundation for my genealogy and subsequent data analysis. I begin by presenting my ontological and epistemological position as they relate to my work. Following this, I lay out key Foucauldian concepts and explain the relevance of each to my work.

Discourse analysis is both a methodology (a particular way of conceiving of knowledge and looking at the world), and a method or way of gathering information. Thus, while Chapter Two presents the theoretical lens through which I analyze my work, Chapter Three - Method details how I conducted my discourse analysis, the questions asked, the texts I analyzed and the rationale for their selection.

Chapter Five - Data Analysis examines two specific sites that are influential in constructing queer subjectivity. This chapter explicates how the discourses of the *DSM-IV-TR*'s diagnosis of GID and the television series *The L Word* work in conjunction with one another to (re)produce

the gender binary and consequently disappear butch. My data analysis chapter concludes with a discussion of the significant discourses employed by *The L Word* and GID that function as technologies of normalization, effectively disappearing butch.

Finally, my Discussion/Conclusion chapter discusses my finding that the discourses disseminated by *The L Word* and GID are consistent with a broader neo-liberal agenda of heteronormative assimilation. Constructed at the intersections of race, class, capitalism, neo-liberalism and internalized homophobia, the lesbian subject is disciplined to want to conform to dominant understandings of what it means to be “normally” gendered. I conclude with a discussion on why butch identity remains important to queer culture and broader aims of social justice and offer my thoughts on transforming the current sexual and gender hierarchy.

Social Work and the Disciplining of Gender Normativity

Produced by and productive of dominant discourses, the so called helping professions, including psychiatry, psychology and social work actively employ technologies of normalization. Descended from charity organizations and missionary work, social work is embedded within colonial ideas and practices aimed at civilizing, assimilating, normalizing, and/or obliterating Indigenous peoples, poor people, racialized people, and Others who do not meet dominant norms. As Foucault (1999) posits,

Social work is inscribed within a larger social function that has been taking on new dimensions for centuries, the function of surveillance and correction: to surveil individuals and to redress them, in the two meaning of the word, alternatively as punishment and as pedagogy (p. 92).

Social work justifies its existence by perpetuating the prevailing belief that marginalized people simply need to learn better ways, to be more like “us” and by positioning itself as an expert in this regard. Evidence for this can be found for example, by examining the historical and current treatment of girls and women in the Canadian criminal justice system. The criminalization of poor, working class and racialized females for failing to conform to societal norms dictating proper White, middle-class, passive, femininity has long characterized the Canadian “just-us” system (Dean, 2005). Protecting and managing appropriate (hetero)sexuality among those feared “at risk” has been at the core of measures aimed at surveilling and policing young women (Dean, 2005). Positioned as the benevolent arm of the judicial system, social work operates tacitly as a function of social control whereby collaboration between social workers, probation officers and the police is common. Moreover, social workers are involved in policing young women’s behaviour long before they come in actual conflict with the justice system (Dean, 2005). Complicitly (re)producing heteronormative discourses, that accordingly necessitate the implementation of “services,” social work as a profession has colluded in the pathologization and repression of queer sexualities (O’Brien, 1999).

Situating Myself – Identity and Theory

My initial interest in this research grew out of my identity as a queer femme and feminist, my desire for lesbians who have butch gender presentations, and my perception and concern that butch identity is disappearing. As a feminist, I have long been interested in examining and transforming power relations as they relate to issues of injustice. Indeed, my desire to foster critical consciousness and dialogue about butch identity and identity more generally within my own community is a significant reason for choosing this research topic. My introduction to

Foucauldian ideas and in particular Foucault's conception of governmentality and technologies of normalization (re)shaped the way I conceive of what is happening with butch identity and lesbian identity more broadly. Foucault's understanding of power, knowledge and subjectivity both intrigued and influenced me. In particular, I was persuaded by Foucault's concept of how through knowledge and power human beings are made subjects. Moreover, the idea that subjectivity is discursively constructed, rather than fixed or innate, attracted me. I have become increasingly interested in the current conditions of existence for butch identity.

Critical to poststructural thought is the notion of subjectivity. I found that I needed to analyse my attachment to identity and reconcile what seemed to be a tension between identity and subjectivity. Rather than "natural" or essential to one's being, I understand identity as a product of subjectivity. In my view, those of us who take up identity do so based on the subject positions currently available to us. Moreover, I concur with Jagose (1996) that "[i]dentity is an effect of identification with and against others: being ongoing, and always incomplete, it is a process rather than a property" (p. 79). As our subjectivity shifts, so too does our identity.

I must admit however, that I have a tenuous relationship to this concept. The idea that subjectivity and thus identity is constantly in a state of flux, fluid, unstable and shifting unsettles me. While I readily see the dangers inherent to essentialism, I fear that having no foundation on which to base shared identity(ies) leaves those of us on the margins with no place from which to organize or even name our oppression. Further I fear that what is at stake is a valuing and affirmation of difference. Rather than multiple subject positions granting more equitable social relations as endorsed by some queer theorists, I fear that the ambiguity derived from refusing to name oneself risks assimilation and conformity to hegemonic standards.

Indeed, this is my concern with butch subjectivity and identity. North American LGBTTTQ communities seem to be seeking greater acceptance and recognition (both social and legal) based on sameness to heteropatriarchal society, and at the same time they are refusing categorization, insisting that labels confine, limit and exclude. When they do so, I believe that queer communities are tacitly participating in technologies of normalization as conceived of by Foucault.

My fear that renouncing identity moves those of us with non-normative gender object desires closer to the centre is rather ironic given that averting assimilation is one of the very reasons queer theorists reject identity and identity-based politics – favouring a politics of difference over one rooted in sameness (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003). Admittedly, identity politics have traditionally been organized around the assumption of a shared, *essential*, experience of oppression (for example gender, sexuality or race). Among feminists such politics have been grounded in universalized conceptions of women's experiences of sexism and in maternity, biological functioning and “women's ways of knowing.”

In rejecting claims to any kind of universal lesbian experience, desire, or sexuality, Butler (1996) argues “that there is no necessarily common element among lesbians, except perhaps that we all know something about how homophobia works against women – although, even then, the language and the analysis we use will differ” (p. 182). While I readily agree that in addition to the multiple ways in which lesbians experience their sexuality, that each of us also experiences homophobia and heterosexism differently (indeed such experiences are also intersected by racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression), I am arguing that the commonly shared material consequences of our subjectivity as lesbians warrants the basis for a collective claim to identity.

Queer theorists such as Jagose (1996) and Sullivan (2006) are right to criticize gay and lesbian liberationist movements who claim LGBTTTQ people as *essentially* the same as heterosexuals (and each other) as a basis for claiming equal rights. In my view, liberationist movements have tended to favour liberal agendas for gay and lesbian rights at the expense of broader social change. I share Jagose (1996) and Sullivan's (2006) concern that arguments based on sameness to heterosexual culture are dangerous and counterproductive to disrupting heteronormative power relations. Indeed, efforts to acquire the privileges associated with White, heteropatriarchal capitalism only reproduce the very injustices they purport to challenge. Where I differ from queer theorists is my assertion that provisional claims to identity grounded not on an essential, and coherent self but on the basis of a shared subject position (recognizing and affirming that we have many divergent ones) and common political goals are necessary in avoiding assimilation and erasure. Acknowledging the limited but political utility of essentialism to identity claims Spivak (1993) articulates,

So long as the critique of essentialism is understood not as an exposure of error, our own or others', but as an acknowledgment of the dangerousness of something one cannot not use.

I would stand by it as one stand among many. The critique of essentialism should not be seen as being critical in the colloquial, Anglo-American sense of being adversely inclined, but as a critique in the robust European philosophical sense (p. 5).

Despite the imperfectness of identity as a concept, I concur with Spivak (1993) that we must at once take up identity and be critical in doing so. Moreover I believe that there are good reasons for using marginalized subject positions to make identity claims. While acknowledging the shortcomings of identity Fuss (1989) argues, “[W]e must nonetheless resist attempts to replace identity with something else” (p. 104). As Gallop (1982 cited in Fuss, 1989) articulates,

I do not believe in some 'new identity' which would be adequate and authentic. But I do not seek some sort of liberation from identity. That would lead only to another form of paralysis – the oceanic passivity of undifferentiation. Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question (p. 104).

While identity claims and, perhaps more importantly our attachments to identity, require deconstruction, I do not see identity and subjectivity as necessarily contradictory. Moreover, I believe that identity can and should recognize its social construction, historical and cultural specificity and be open to resignification (Butler, 1990). Identity claims need to account for difference by acknowledging variation, context and multiple ways of being. My hope is that this work will foster a politics of difference that is open to contradiction and contestation.

Queer Theory

Queer theory has significantly enriched and expanded contemporary thinking about sexuality, gender, and identity. The greatest strength of queer theory in my view is its refusal to conform to dominant, hegemonic practices. Much of my thinking is consistent with that of queer theorists however my position that identity is critical to a politics of difference is antithetical to queer theoretical underpinnings. In its refusal to define itself, queer can include everybody and mean nothing, raising the question of what does it mean to be queer and, more importantly, what is the political significance of queer? In my view, queer theory undermines its own objective of a politics centred upon difference. While this work has certainly been influenced by queer theorists (Butler and Halberstam in particular), I have not used a specifically queer methodological framework for my research.

The Importance of Language

I noticed that through the process of reading, writing and (re)thinking about my research, my ideas, subjectivity and identity have been disrupted. A critical shift for me has been my thinking about the word “queer” and the word “lesbian.” Queer has been and continues to be (albeit more tentatively) a primary identity label for me. I readily took up queer because to me the term asserts a distinctly political tone, one that I’ve felt is lacking from the term lesbian and even more so, bisexual. Whereas “queer” in my mind explicitly announces and positively affirms difference from dominant sexual norms, I have tended to associate both the terms lesbian and bisexual with White, middle-class values as well as with clinical language that has been imposed on us – some of the very criticisms that have been leveled by queer theorists.

I have found that queer is more likely than gay, lesbian or bi, to cause discomfort in straight circles as it seems straight identified people don’t know what to make of the word. Moreover, I feel that there exists a hegemonic desire to possess and reduce the Other to a recognizable, knowable, stable entity – to be able to say “you are this.” As Davies (1990) contends, “Classifying oneself and others, and being classified, are interesting and dangerous processes, because classification can be a way of controlling, of reducing, of slotting someone into that which is already known” (p. 38). Queer identity has for me been a strategy of resistance to feeling reduced.

Significantly however, I have also taken up queer for the space it feels it grants in terms of desire. While queer theorists tend to shun identity claims, queer has unquestionably been an identity for me, albeit decidedly less defined than lesbian. In addition to queer feeling (to me) more politicized, queer does not foreclose relationships with men or with those who do not clearly fit prescribed gendered and sexed boxes. Having once been in love with a man, it has not

felt honest to call myself a lesbian. These days however I find I am questioning more and more what it means to *be* a lesbian. I understand the term in its most basic sense, to mean women who sexually desire other women. Does that conversely mean women who never desire men? Women who never have sex with men? Moreover, can a lesbian be someone who has loved a man? Increasingly, I find it difficult to imagine being sexually involved with a man. I also strongly identify with, feel passionately invested in, and a part of lesbian/queer culture and community. Does that mean I *am* now a lesbian?

At the same time however that I am considering the implications of the disappearing butch, I am questioning what is potentially risked by not claiming the word lesbian. Did/does queer in fact allow me to conceal or dilute my desire for women, bringing me more in line with mainstream normativity? If it is abnormal for women to not desire men, do I appear more “normal” if my identity suggests I sometimes do? In other words, rather than marking me as different (and thus politicized), does queer in fact make me appear more like “everybody else?”

Perhaps what currently seems most suspect to me about queer is that it seems to be gaining some momentum in mainstream circles. In some circles queer seems to be in vogue – it now seems almost trendy to be queer. This cannot be said however with regard to lesbian identity. Are lesbians becoming passé, too boring or in their disavowal of male desire, in fact too queer? If so, what are the implications for non-normative sexualities?

I believe that what we call ourselves (or resist calling ourselves) matters. Identifying for example, as male, female, a lesbian or straight carries with it significant material and political affects. For marginalized subjectivities identity labels are an important organizing tool and a way of marking out divergent culture within mainstream hegemony. Identity labels convey pride in who we are. They positively assert the value of difference. Queer identity labels critically

challenge the heterosexual imperative and taken for granted gender norms. Referencing a talk she gave to local high school students, butch writer Ivan Coyote (2010) explains her decision to be introduced as “she”,

Somewhere along the line I realized that who I am and what I call myself might matter a whole lot to them. Because I want to stand up in front of a whole bunch of bodies coursing with newly minted hormones and prove to them that female bodies can look like just about anything their owners want them to (p. 12).

In my struggle to define myself, I vacillate in this work between including myself in reference to lesbian identity and at other times deliberately choosing to exclude myself. Recognizing that my own subjectivity is constructed by dominant discourses, I strive to be deliberate in my language choices attending to my own internalized homophobia, engagement with technologies of normalization, as well as my intention to not appropriate an identity that does not authentically describe my experience (recognizing at the same time that authenticity is a subjective determination). Unable to reconcile myself between queer and lesbian I have uneasily settled upon identifying myself in this work as a “queer/lesbian.”

In self-describing myself as queer, my intention is to indicate my tendency towards non-normative sexual partners and my rejection of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. I sometimes reference queer more broadly as an umbrella term to include gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people. I am cognizant however that one of the problems with “queer” is that this usage problematically masks differences between these groups. I am taking up lesbian identity to explicitly affirm my sexual desire for women, to indicate my solidarity with other lesbians, and to advance the importance of lesbian as an identity category. Conceding the words of Fuss (1989, italics in original) “that simply *being* gay or lesbian is not sufficient to constitute political

activism” (p. 101); it is my belief that lesbian identity is political (even though some lesbians do not see themselves as such). The intention of my research is to positively affirm the value of identity and a distinctly lesbian identity in particular. It is my hope that in demonstrating the value of difference, this paper will foster an upsurge in the politicization of lesbian identity in my community, thus furthering resistance to heteropatriarchal norms.

While my emphasis is on contesting the terms of gender, I am mindful of the ways in which dominant discourses of maleness, femaleness, femininity, and masculinity exist within and through constructs of heteronormativity, Whiteness, and middle-class acceptability. As demonstrated by Foucault, language is a constituent of power relations. A central tenet of poststructural thought (and discourse analysis more specifically), is to unsettle that which discourse presents as truth, to expose the relations of power that underlie language. To this end, and following other anti-racist critics, I capitalize the term White in an effort to make its presence evident throughout my work. Moreover, this work aims to make “the familiar unfamiliar and [make] visible what we take for granted” (Chambon, 1999, p. 54).

Butch = Lesbian

If lesbianism ceases to be a defining aspect of identity for many women and becomes simply an image, and if notions of what a lesbian looks like break down as fashion codes change and recombine, will we lose sight of what it means to be a lesbian in a largely heterosexual world? (Stein, 1992, p. 438).

My use of the word butch throughout this research is intended to describe a type of lesbian subjectivity. I digress from other queer theorists (notably Halberstam, 1998) who use butch more broadly as a descriptor of female masculinity, that is masculinity performed or produced by

a female body. While I take the position that butch is a representation of female masculinity, and indeed arguably the most visible and organized in North American culture, I deviate from Halberstam (1998) in my resistance to name all performances of female masculinity as butch. My use of the term butch is exclusively in reference to lesbians and female masculinity to butch lesbians. Butch is historically tied to both lesbian and FTM (female to male transsexual) culture. Increasingly however it is no longer understood to connote lesbianism. Butch is now frequently taken up by both FTM and gay male communities. I fear that the dwindling use of butch by lesbians in conjunction with its increased popularity among diverse queer communities is contributing to the disappearance of butch lesbians. I'm concerned that butch is losing its significance and historical connection to lesbian culture. Moreover, I worry that referencing butch to potentially include anybody and everybody, erases lesbians, lesbian culture and the history of butch/femme. I believe this history is critical to lesbian existence; the past links us to the present, and in doing so provides opportunities for resisting hegemonic heterosexuality. The rich history of butch/femme relationships, notably butch's connection to lesbians of colour, and the lengths that have been undertaken to suppress butch/femme culture demonstrate the degree to which lesbians have been a threat to hegemonic White heteropatriarchy. Moreover, it is the combination of female masculinity with lesbianism that has proven most threatening. Understanding the unique history of butch as specific to lesbian culture is necessary if we are to fully grasp and resist the current conditions for lesbian existence.

I believe that it is politically dangerous for lesbians to assimilate into dominant culture. We still live in a culture of rigid gender rules, enforced in part through compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal power. Not only does assimilation hinder our ability to identify and resist patriarchal and homophobic oppression, those among us with more privilege are more likely to

be co-opted to acquiesce to racist and capitalist agendas. Butch as I have defined it is a significant challenge to heteropatriarchy, and a reminder of the intersectionality of oppression. Butch remains an overt signifier of resistance to mandatory codes of sexual and gendered conduct. In my view, butch is a profoundly feminist statement. Butch is a resounding fuck you to all of the rules that dictate who women should sleep with and what women are supposed to look like. It is imperative that butch not be diluted to meaninglessness.

Conclusion

This chapter has been intended to lay the foundation for my thesis and to introduce my ontological framework vis-à-vis lesbian existence. In the next chapter I build on this by more fully exploring my ontological and epistemological assumptions and by delineating key poststructural concepts that are central to my work.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Pivotal in determining research methodologies are the concepts ontology and epistemology. Ontology speaks to one's worldview and understanding of how the world works. Related to this is the concept of epistemology which refers to one's understanding about the production of knowledge. I begin by outlining my ontological and epistemological assumptions and their connection to my chosen methodology. Following this, I delineate significant Foucauldian concepts that are central to my work.

My research employs feminist methodology and Foucauldian discourse analysis to deconstruct how we use hegemonic discourses that both construct and erase butch identity. The focus of my analysis is organized around the question: How do dominant discourses discipline queer subjectivity and butch subjectivity in particular? To this end, I examine what these discourses say, or not say about queer identity, lesbians, normative sexuality and gender, women and men.

Michel Foucault was keenly interested in examining relations of power and the ways in which power is mediated by discourse. He was particularly interested in the production of the subject or more specifically the ways in which relations of power construct the human subject. Specifically employing a gendered analysis, feminism is also interested in examining and transforming power relations. Accordingly, I employ a poststructural feminist lens to examine how dominant discourses discipline butch subjectivity. I examine how butch lesbian identity is being made to disappear in North America, the contingencies that account for this and the current conditions of existence for the lesbian subject.

Feminism and Poststructuralism, Ontology and Epistemology

I have chosen to utilize feminist methodologies and Foucauldian discourse analysis as they cohere strongly with my epistemological and ontological framework. Indeed, Foucault's employment of discourse analysis embodies a particular way of looking at the world and the construction of knowledge. Foucauldian concepts such as discourse, genealogy, subjectivity and governmentality, work together to characterize a specific, epistemological and ontological context. I briefly outline these concepts and the assumptions which underlie them, particularly attending to those features which resonate the most for me as a feminist researcher and with my research topic

As noted by Strega (2005) and Weedon (1997), feminism and poststructuralism share an emphasis on power and language as well as similar emancipatory goals. Feminism is concerned with the oppression of women and many feminist theorists (for example Dale Spender and Julia Penelope) have examined the ways in which language constructs our lives. "Feminist poststructuralism maintains an emphasis on the material bases of power (for example, social, economic, and cultural arrangements) and the need for change at this level of discourse" (Gavey, 1989, p. 464).

Similarly poststructuralism "looks to historically specific discursive relations and social practices" (Weedon, 1997, p. 22) to explain and transform inequitable social relations. Post-structural theory takes the position that "reality" and "truth" are socially produced through the discourses available to us. Discourse defines what is possible not just with regard to language but also constructs who we "are" as subjects. This ontological perspective is consistent with my own worldview – the existence of a butch subject relies on and is produced by the discourses available to us.

As a queer/lesbian and feminist, I am interested in disrupting hegemonic assumptions that construct sexuality and gender. I take the position that gender is discursively produced in language and social practices. From the moment we are born, we are inculcated into our appropriate gender presentation. The rewards for conformity are significant – love, acceptance, a sense of belonging, the ability to earn a living and the ability to live without fear of violence or social ostracism. Conversely, the penalty for non-conformity is equally as great. Depending upon one's time and place the consequences can include social exclusion, pathologization, imprisonment, and even death. What is deemed “normal” is determined and disciplined by discourses that define who fits and who is outside. Citing Foucault (1981), Hook (2001) maintains, “discursive practices work in both inhibiting and productive ways, implying a play of prescriptions that designate both exclusions and choices” (p. 523). “Otherness” is determined by what we are not. By focusing on the “abnormal,” the norm is upheld, taken for granted and unscrutinized. The disciplining of subjects is an important aspect of Foucault's analyses and is the focus of this work.

Foucault (1972) understood power and knowledge as inseparable from each other. As a product of discourse, knowledge is both “produced by and productive of power” (Strega, 2005, p. 226). Like Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) I believe that information gathered by researchers “is produced in a social process of giving meaning to the social world...Facts are (not) lying about waiting for the researcher to spot them” (p. 154). In the same way, Strega (2005) argues, “Knowledge is not ‘discovered’ but is a product of discourse and power relations, a discursive struggle over which (and whose) perspective or understanding emerges as the one that ‘counts’” (p. 218). My research and conclusions are a product of “who I am” and the

discourses accessible that construct me – they cannot be separated. Discourse is thus both an effect and an instrument of power (Hook, 2001).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is key to my ontological framework and to Foucauldian discourse analysis more broadly. As producers of knowledge both constituting and constituted by discourse, reflexivity is imperative throughout the research process. As Cheek (2004) suggests “Discourse analysis is an approach that influences the research and researcher at every point – from the questions asked to those ignored, from whom is studied to whom is ignored, from problem formation to analysis, representation and writing” (p. 1148-1149).

Rejecting objective, positivist claims to knowledge, I contend that the researcher is never neutral. Our interpretations are shaped by our subjectivity and the discourses available to us. Bucholtz (2001, cited in Rogers Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & O’Garro Joseph, 2005) advocates that “the analysts’ choices at every step in the research process are visible as a part of the discourse investigation, and critique does not stop with social processes, whether macro-level or micro-level, but rather extends to the analysis itself” (p. 381). With this in mind, I’ve endeavoured to position myself within the text, clearly articulating my decision making process throughout my research.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a method of inquiry that attentively examines the relationship between language and the social world (Gavey, 1989). Foucauldian discourse analysis is concerned not with language per se, but rather with “events – the law of *existence* of statements, that which

rendered them possible...their correlation with other previous or simultaneous events...” (Foucault, 1991, p. 59, italics in original). Foucault was not so much interested in what was said, but with what is *allowed* to be said and the ways in which what is permissible is shaped by relations of power. As Weedon (1997) articulates, the aim is to interrogate specific details of a discursive field “in order to uncover the particular regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations” (p. 104).

Foucault studied the ways in which power is exercised within particular discursive fields such as psychiatry, the penal system and the production of sexuality. His work centred on how human beings are made subjects, documenting “the circumstances that make actions and statements possible, their ‘network of contingencies’ or ‘conditions of existence’” (Chambon, 1999, p. 65). Linking the micro to the macro, Foucault was concerned with materiality (Chambon, 1999; Hook, 2001). He examined “practices and local circumstances: not institutions but institutional practices; not ideology but statements; not the ‘subject’ but the embodied subject” (Chambon, 1999, p. 56).

Foucault (1981) delineated two methods of analysis. He distinguished “critical analysis (which examines the functions of exclusion, the process of depletion, that is, the institutional role),” from “genealogical analysis (which examines the formation of discourses, the constituting processes of desire)” (Foucault, 1981, p. 49). Taking up the former, discourse analysis meticulously attends to the relationship between language and social practices – how certain practices and subjectivities are enabled or constrained (Cheek, 2004). The role of the analyst is to uncover unstated or unspoken assumptions, making visible that what is taken for granted (Chambon, 1999; Cheek, 2004). Foucault (1981) instructs,

What is analysed is not simply what was thought or said per se, but all the discursive rules and categories that were a priori, assumed as a constituent part of a discourse and therefore of knowledge, and so fundamental that they remained unvoiced or unthought (p. 48).

Rather than focus on similarities or themes, discourse analysts look for differences, inconsistencies, divergences, searching “for similar functions across a variety of different forms (language, practices, material reality, institutions, subjectivity)” (Hook, 2001, p. 534). Taking up Foucault, Hook (2001) and Strega (2005) direct that we move beyond the text, to what is outside language, the discursive and the “extra-discursive.” Hook (2001) posits that Foucault aimed “to impress upon us the fact that similar discursive acts can occur in a multitude of different ways, in various forms that stretch from what has typically been considered ‘discursive’, that is, the textual, to the ‘extra-discursive’, the material level of discursive practices” (p. 537). Moreover Hook (2001) emphasizes that we must analyse the material effect of discourse on the embodied subject or in his words, “drive the analysis of the discursive *through the extra-discursive*” (p. 543, italics in original).

Consistent with its poststructural underpinnings, discourse analysis is not aimed at revealing a new truth, but revealing the falsity of truth itself. Discourse analysis affirms its partiality and the role of subjectivity in the analysis. Moreover Davies, Browne, Gannon, Hopkins, McCann, & Wihlborg (2006) note, “the deconstructive process is always partial, messy and incomplete” (p. 90).

Genealogy

Foucault employed a genealogical analysis to retrace and document the formation of discourse and its conditions of existence (Chambon, 1999). By engaging a “history of the present”,

Foucault (1979, cited in Chambon, 1999, p. 54) examined how discourses are enabled to cohere. As Foucault (1983, cited in Chambon, 1999) describes,

In my opinion, recourse to history is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history (p. 54-55).

While discourse analysis interrogates the function of discursive practices, genealogical analyses retrace the historical specificity of how particular discourses came to be, noting changes over time. Foucault (1971) asserts, “It is thus that critical and genealogical descriptions are to alternate, support and complete each other” (p. 162).

Taking up Foucault, I have employed a genealogy to historically document butch subjectivity in North America. My genealogy uncovers the present conditions of butch existence and provides clues to the ways in which butch is currently being disappeared. Beginning in the present, I trace the history of butch moving backwards in time to the 1940s.

Discourse

Chambon (1999) argues, “More than ways of naming, discourses are systems of thought and systematic ways of carving out reality. They are structures of knowledge that influence systems of practices” (p. 57). Discourses both reflect and produce “reality” (Cheek, 2004). They frequently become so taken for granted that they are assumed to be merely common sense. In their appeal to common sense, discourses appear “natural.” Alternative versions of reality are hidden and rendered unthinkable. Weedon (1997) argues that “it is a consistent feature of most forms of discourse that they deny their own partiality. They fail to acknowledge that they are but

possible versions of meaning rather than ‘truth’ itself and that they represent particular interests” (p. 94).

Discourses are frequently recognized as “truth” because of the institutional authority that has been bestowed on them. Moreover, “The most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases, in the law, for example, or in medicine, social welfare, education and in the organization of the family and work” (Weedon, 1997, p. 105). Discourses both enable and constrain knowledge. They determine who can speak (and who cannot) and with what authority (Cheek, 2004; Rogers et al., 2005). Foucault (1971, italics in original) asserts,

I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. In a society such as ours we all know the rules of *exclusion*. The most obvious and familiar concerns what is *prohibited*. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything (p. 149).

Poststructural theory asserts that essentialized, universal truths, are rather historically, and culturally specific discursive strategies. Discourse is thus never neutral, but rather competes for power and reflects distinct political interests (Weedon, 1997). Foucault (1971) notes, “that the areas where this web is most tightly woven today, where the danger spots are most numerous, are those dealing with politics and sexuality” (p. 149). Moreover, dominant discourse “reflects particular values and class, gender and racial interests” (Weedon, 1997, p. 35).

Subjectivity

A defining feature of poststructural thought is the notion that discourse gives rise to subjects (Hook, 2001). In contrast to the Enlightenment assumption of the self-ruling, free and rational individual, poststructural thought conceives the individual as subjectively produced by the discourses available to us. Within poststructuralism there is no essential core or “true” self. We are not free in the liberal sense to become whomever we want because what we want and the choices we make are constrained by discourse. As such, “choice” is historically, culturally, and socially specific. Weedon (1997) further explains, “Whereas, in principle, the individual is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality, individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society” (p. 91).

This does not imply however, that the subject is entirely without agency. It suggests however that there is no place outside of discourse. The embodied subject is therefore either taking up or resisting dominant discourse. In relation to patriarchal constructions of femininity, Weedon (1997) articulates,

Yet even when we resist a particular subject position and the mode of subjectivity which it brings with it, we do so from a position of an alternative social definition of femininity. In patriarchal societies we cannot escape the implications of femininity. Everything we do signifies compliance or resistance to dominant norms of what it is to be a woman (p. 83).

In the same way, lesbians cannot escape the implications of heteronormativity. Regardless of whether we disavow hegemonic constructions, “All subjects – including the transformed (or more correctly, the transforming) poststructuralist subject, who is capable of critically analyzing the constitutive force of discourse – are always inside language” (Davies et al., 2006, p. 90).

Governmentality

Dominant discourses tacitly demarcate the good from the bad and the sane from the mad.

Foucault coined the terms governmentality and regulating practices to explain the ways in which technologies of normalization discursively discipline the individual to behave and not behave in specific and strategic ways (Chambon, 1999). Foucault (1982, cited in Chambon, 1999) argued, “To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (p. 66).

Technologies of normalization ensure that individuals want to comply with dominant discourse; we are made to want to regard ourselves as “normal.” One of the ways in which governmentality is enacted is through self discipline or technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988, cited in Foote & Frank, 1999). As Chambon (1999) articulates, “Disciplinary practices recruit the willing participation of the individual in the constitution of their identity. In other words, the self contributes to its own making” (p. 68). Without coercion, we therefore become the subject for whom the discourse allows. This is a key concept of this research.

Delineating technologies of normalization, Foucault identified how they function as dividing practices (1982). Taking up Foucault, Chambon (1999) articulates the effects of dividing practices,

They constitute polarities between self and other, good and bad, normal and pathological...
 These divisions expand into elaborate classification systems with internal graduations.
 They locate individuals within series and assign them a relational rank...They define
 degrees of development and hierarchies of deviance. They establish the multiple processes
 of affirmation and reward, surveillance and exclusion” (p. 67).

As I discuss later, the marginalization of lesbians and butch lesbians in particular has long been a disciplining practice intended to both penalize unacceptable conduct and mold the proper

heteronormative subject. In the context of butch subjectivity, technologies of normalization historically functioned to divide middle class, primarily White lesbians from working class (often non-White) bar butches marking the latter as relatively more degenerate. Moreover, both hetero and homonormativity function to govern possible lesbian subjectivities while simultaneously excluding others.

Sexual Science and Gender Conformity

Foucault's (1980) first volume of *The History of Sexuality* is a useful analytic lens in understanding the disciplining of subjectivity, particularly as it relates to human sexuality. Foucault has written extensively about the deployment of sexuality as central in the formation of the subject and in constructing relations of power. He explains,

[S]ex as a political issue... was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand, it was tied to the disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification, and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies. On the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity. It fitted in both categories at once, giving rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body. But it gave rise as well to comprehensive measures, statistical assessments, and interventions aimed at the entire social body or at groups taken as a whole (Foucault, 1980, p. 145-146).

For the purposes of my analysis, I draw on Foucault's (1980) theories regarding sexuality, specifically examining how the disciplining of butch relates to Foucault's concept of "scienta

sexualis” or sexual science. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, Foucault (1980) argues that sex has been discursively appropriated as an area requiring professional expertise, medicalization, and scientific intervention. “(S)ought out in the smallest details of individual existences” (Foucault, 1980, p. 146), sexual science has concentrated on examining, categorizing, and managing sex. As technologies of normalization, these methods construct knowledge and relations of power, delimiting certain subject positions. Foucault (1980) posits,

Situating at the point of intersection of a technique of confession and a scientific discursivity, where certain major mechanisms had to be found for adapting them to one another (the listening technique, the postulate of causality, the principle of latency, the rule of interpretation, the imperative of medicalization), sexuality was defined as being ‘by nature’: a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions... (p.68)

Foucault (1980) calls into question the idea that sexuality has been historically repressed. His “repressive hypothesis” argues instead that, looking back over the last three centuries we have seen a “veritable discursive explosion” (Foucault, 1980, p. 17). Rather than sexual silence, Foucault (1980) contends that there was an intensification and multiplication of sex requiring the administration and management of human life.

According to Foucault (1980), this management has come in the form of what he has termed “bio-power” or “bio-politics.” As Chambon et al., (1999) describe, bio-power is, a conceptual tool that makes it possible to analyse historically how power has to come to work in relation to the human body. The concept refers to the mechanism that takes the body and life as objects of intervention... Sexuality is located at a privileged intersection

between the individual and the population. It is a target of self-knowledge and the essential means to regulate the reproduction of a population (p. 270).

Foucault (1980) delineated two forms of bio-power or “poles of development.” Referencing Foucault, O’Brien (1999) explains the first, “anatomy-politics” or “disciplinary power,” as power that “operates on the human body as a machine attempting to optimize... its political docility” (p. 132). In other words, anatomy-politics describes the use of disciplinary power in making the body conform. Foucault (1980) referred to the second pole of development as “regulation of the population.” While the first pole is about controlling the individual through the use of disciplinary power such as for example sanctioning, the second is about controlling the population through regulatory measures.

Disciplining Gender Normativity: Pedagogization and Psychiatrization

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology...The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (Foucault, 1980, p. 43).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1980) identifies what he refers to as the “four great strategic unities which, beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex” (p. 103). These unities are “hysterization of women’s bodies,” “pedagogization of children’s sex,” “socialization of procreative behavior,” and “psychiatrization of perverse pleasure.” Accomplishing in different ways the two poles of bio-power, these unities have constituted sexuality through the authority vested in scientific knowledge. Based on the commonly held assumption that sexuality and gender presentation

correspond to each other, all four unities are productive of knowledge and power with regard to gender normativity. The pedagogization of children's sexuality and the psychiatrization of perversity are particularly relevant in analyzing the methods in which the *DSM* and *The L Word* disappear butch.

“A pedagogization of children's sexuality” articulates the idea that children's sexuality is dangerous and thus requires the management of parents, educators, doctors, and psychiatrists (Foucault, 1980). As one of many threats to children's sexuality, it is feared that gender non-conformity in girls will result in lesbianism. Efforts to control girl's sexual behavior at the level of regulating the population include medical discourses authorizing normal gendered behaviour (such as the *DSM*) and Canadian law such as the Juvenile Delinquents Act (1908-1984) and its' successors. At the level of disciplining the body, parents and educators are charged with individually grooming and supervising heteronormative behaviour including in girls, socially appropriate gendered conduct as defined by White, Western discourses of femininity.

The fourth strategic unity, “a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” articulates how technologies of normalization came to be used in the deployment of sexuality. Foucault (1980) explains that all sexual practices were minutely analysed, categorized and diagnosed as either normal or pathological, adding that “finally, a corrective technology was sought for these anomalies” (p. 105). While sexologists have debated and differed about the “cause” of homosexuality, they have in previous years been fairly unanimous in their diagnosis of pathology. Historically, the main “cure” for this disorder has been prevention through the deployment of disciplinary discourses that make butch pathological. In the context of bio-power, the body was made to conform through the propagation of medical and mainstream discourse that designated the “mannish lesbian” a pervert or “predatory lesbian who seduces innocent

young girls causing them to give up the thought of marriage and family life for a life of homosexual enslavement” (Caprio, 1954, p. 8).

Conclusion

I began this chapter by illustrating the ways in which my ontological and epistemological assumptions have informed my methodological decisions. Of particular relevance is the assertion that discourse is constructed by power and knowledge and that discourses give rise to subjects. As specific political strategies, discourses carry with them material affects that shape our desires. Through technologies of normalization we are discursively disciplined to desire particular subjectivities at the exclusion of others. The normalizing of sexuality has emerged through bio-power. In the context of disciplining lesbian subjectivity, through the psychiatrization of perversity and pedagogization of children’s sexuality, our bodies are discursively made to want to comply. Employing these concepts, my Data Analysis and Discussion/Conclusion chapters examine the ways in which *The L Word* and the *DSM-IV-TR*’s Gender Identity Disorder (GID) effectively disciplines lesbian subjectivity and disappears butch.

The following chapter builds on these ideas and explains how I apply discourse analysis as a method. My Method chapter details how I conducted my analysis, the questions asked of my text, the texts that were chosen and the rationale for doing so.

Chapter Three: Method

Situated within my methodological, epistemological and ontological framework, this chapter builds on the concepts outlined in my methodology and explains how I've employed discourse analysis as a method. With an aim to elucidating how butch lesbian identity is being made to disappear in North America, this chapter outlines the methods I use to expose the discourses in operation and reveal the ways in which they construct subjectivity and subsequently relations of power. To make clear the rationale of my data selection and method of analysis, I begin by expanding on my earlier proposition that the shunning of identity and desire for mainstream inclusivity threaten butch identity.

As stated in my Introduction, I propose that there are (at least) two possible explanations for the erasure of butch. The first of these relates to postmodernism's rejection of identity and identity-based politics. As Carolyn Noble (2004) points out, "For postmodernists, 'life' is to be embraced without 'truth', universal standards or generalizable ideals" (p. 292). As a progeny of post-modern thought, queer theory rejects the essentialism viewed as inherent to identity claims. Arguing that identity operates to reinscribe the very oppression it seeks to eradicate, queer theorists eschew identity in favour of fluidity. While in no way intending to suggest that queer theory is apolitical, I believe that an unintended consequence of its refusal to be named, is its appeal to neo-liberal ideals. Carolyn Noble (2004) agrees, "The emergence of a postmodern, fractured, disillusioned, uncertain, and certainly more consumerist world has been embraced by a neo-liberal world view" (p. 293).

The second point of butch erasure, and related to postmodernism's rejection of identity, is neo-liberalism's emphasis on choice and individual rights. Both neo-liberalism and postmodernism construct individuals "as free to pursue their own destinies" (C. Noble, 2004,

291). Moreover, Carolyn Noble (2004) argues within the context of social work and I would argue activism more generally, that consequential to postmodern thought, “the social whole” has been jettisoned in favour of “the individual in context” (p. 295). While queer theorists have critiqued identity politics for emphasizing sameness with marginalized Others at the expense of erasing difference, neo-liberalism insists on rights based on sameness with the White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual male.

To realize neo-liberal aspirations and all it promises, technologies of normalization and of the self are required. This requires the butch lesbian subject to present herself more closely to the norm. In other words, to tone down her butch Otherness either by appearing more like a “normal” (read feminine) woman or by taking up a male identity. The neo-liberal subject must be immediately and unambiguously recognizable as a woman or as man.

Two sites where I see technologies of normalization heavily dictating lesbian and/or queer subjectivity are mainstream media and the medical establishment. In addition to my genealogical analyses, I subject representations of these sites to a Foucauldian discourse analysis with an aim to uncovering how butch is being made to disappear.

Discourse Analysis as Method

People are quite able to distinguish between a random list of sentences and a coherent text, and it is the principles which underlie this recognition of coherence which are the topic of study for discourse analysts (Stubbs, 1983, cited in Gough & Talbot, 1996, p. 217).

Institutionally located within science, medicine, education and law, dominant discourses are at the same time frequently those that are automatically assumed as common sense (Weedon, 1997). As previously outlined, my aim as an analyst is to expose and denaturalize that which is

taken-for-granted. Specifically, I examine the discourses (re)produced by the television series *The L Word* and the *DSM-IV-TR* GID. My intention is to make visible those discourses that construct or delimit butch subjectivity through the structuring of power relations. Central to this task is a focus on coherence. The success of normalizing technologies relies on the discernment of particular discourses. Crucial to this discernment is prior knowledge of other supporting discourses. For discourse to cohere, the subject must be able to make connections between discourses that are not explicit in the text – the *extra-discursive* as discussed earlier. As Gough and Talbot (1996) explain, “[T]he construction of coherence relies heavily on the ability of the reader to fill in details not provided by textual cues themselves” (p. 221). In other words, the reader must draw upon what is thought of as “common sense.” In making these connections the reader is herself constructed as a subject. In other words, we must become the subject for whom the discourse makes sense.

Dominant discourses maintain their power in part, because of their ability to seduce the subject into taking up their “appropriate” subjectivity. As Foucault (1981) articulates, the effect of discourse “is to make it virtually impossible to think outside them. To think outside them is by definition, to be mad, to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason” (p. 48). My task as analyst was to refuse to be complicit with the text, to think the unthinkable and to say the unsayable.

To accomplish, this I endeavoured to make connections both inside and outside the text noting:

- References that indicated the need for my complicity and collusion in making sense of the text.

- The underlying assumptions, stereotypes and supporting discourses required for coherence.
- The relations of power constructed by such assumptions.
- The subjectivities presumed and constituted by the text.

In all of these texts, I methodically analyzed how lesbians are constructed, particularly attending to the place/absence of masculine appearing women. Specifically, I looked for indicators of a butch presence as well as how discourses either made absent, feminized, and/or constructed masculine lesbians as occupying heteronormative subject positions as either feminine women or trans men. My intention was to use Foucault's approach to expose the more subtle productions of power – a strategy most useful “not when we impose force where it is not wanted but when we exercise our influence in apparently wanted ways...” (Chambon, 1999, p. 64). To this end, I specifically attended to strategies which delimit butch subjectivity including:

- Prohibition or taboo: What is not said implicitly but present, for example that to be a woman is to be feminine and that the preferred and rewarded lesbian subject is the one who conforms most closely to heteronormative standards of what it means to be a woman.
- Madness: that those who do not conform to gender prescriptions are deviant, sick, defective and pathological.
- True/false dichotomy: that television shows like the L-Word are evidence that the larger society is more tolerant and accepting of lesbians today thereby overshadowing that only certain lesbians have actually been granted access to the inner circle. The significant nuances of lesbian and queer acceptability are discursively made invisible by simplistic either/or assertions.

As part of the broader neo-liberal project, popular culture and mainstream media conditionally grant respectability to those who comply with hetero-normalization while simultaneously demonizing and pathologizing the deviant, non-conformative (butch) lesbian. Drawing on research conducted by Dow (2001), Ciasullo (2001), Farr and Degroult (2008), Hamer (1994), Herman (2003) Jenkins, (2005), and Reed (2009) my analysis attempted to uncover strategies which reaffirm a heteronormative ontology. These authors respectively identify various normalizing techniques intended to privilege heterosexuality including positioning the lesbian subject as akin to heterosexuality (for example, as part of the nuclear family as seen in the work of Farr and Degroult, 2008; Hamer, 1994 and Herman, 2003); deploying tactics intended to feminize, desexualize, heterosexualize, or depoliticize the lesbian subject (Ciasullo, 2001; Dow, 2001; Farr and Degroult, 2008; Hamer, 1994; Jenkins, 2005; Reed 2009); and/or by constructing butch lesbian subjectivity as deviant by positioning her as an inferior outsider (Ciasullo, 2001; Dow 2001; Herman 2003; Jenkins 2005; Reed 2009). In short, by offering “good” lesbians who appeal to straight audiences and to lesbians while at the same time (and often tacitly), reinscribing the undesirability of the “bad” (butch) lesbian. This undesirability is signaled by overtly denigrating stereotypical depictions of lesbians (as seen in the teen genre films critiqued by Jenkins, 2005), by placing butch lesbians in peripheral roles that “serve as points of reference to emphasize the ‘appropriate’ femininity of the primary characters” (Farr & Degroult, 2008, p. 428, critique of *The L Word* and *Queer as Folk*), and by entirely negating butch existence by constructing White, upwardly mobile femininity as definitive of lesbianism (Ciasullo, 2001; Jenkins, 2005; Farr & Degroult, 2008). By attending to constructions of deviance, my intention was to expose power relations and make visible subjugated subject positions.

In addition to attending to questions concerning cohesion, inclusion and exclusion, my textual analysis was further guided by posing the following overarching questions:

- Who is the lesbian/queer subject that these media representations propose and how is she positioned within the text?
- What do these representations rest on? What underlying assumptions are required for their coherence?
- Does the proposed lesbian subject reaffirm or disrupt normative constructions of sexuality and gender?
- Which lesbian or queer subject positions are demonized, denied, Othered, or rendered invisible and which are privileged and made normal? How is this achieved?
- Through what normative lens is the lesbian subject framed?
- How do the intersections of class and race construct the proposed lesbian subject?
- What are the material consequences and power relations constructed by these discourses?
- How does my own subjectivity guide my interpretations?
- How am I complicit in these discourses?

Criteria for Data Selection

My data selection choice was determined through interrogating possible texts with the following two questions: Does the “text” provide prescriptive guidelines for conduct? Secondly, what is the scope of influence of the text?

Before expanding on these criteria, I will define my use of the word text. While traditionally understood to be limited to the written word, a Foucauldian understanding of text incorporates

any type of communicative event such as conversations, magazine articles, films, pictures, instruction manuals, and advertisements. Cheek (2004) argues, “Texts convey particular aspects of reality in particular ways...[T]exts not only represent and reflect a certain version of reality, they also play a part in the very construction and maintenance of that reality itself” (p. 1144).

I am interested in the importance of text as a normalizing technology intended to regulate, discipline and construct lesbian subjectivity. Following Winch’s (2005) guidelines for conducting a genealogy, my “data” will be “drawn from ‘practical texts’ that provide rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave in a certain fashion. These texts are themselves objects of a ‘practice’ in that they are designed to underpin everyday conduct” (p. 181). With this in mind, my intention is to employ dominant discourses to expose the ways in which these texts operate to define common sense rules of behaviour.

My second criteria is concerned with how accessible and far reaching is the discursive power of particular texts. For this analysis I am interested in the scope of influence as a normalizing technology in a North American context. My data selection considers the intended audience (specifically, is the text directed at disciplining lesbian or queer subjectivity), how many people are exposed to the text, and how much authority is vested in the text.

Data Selection

With an aim to selecting the most compelling data for analysis, I have chosen to examine the television series *The L Word*, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) IV-TR* diagnosis Gender Identity Disorder (GID). Determining the best data sources was a challenging decision to say the least. There are many sites demonstrating the disappearance of butch. However, while affirming that discourse is both an effect and an instrument of power, I believe that some

discursive practices are more reflective than productive of subjectivity. It is my assertion that the texts I have selected are highly productive of lesbian subjectivity. Indeed, one of the reasons why these texts are so successful is that by mutually reinforcing and authorizing one another, they work together in disciplining butch subjectivity.

The L Word was an immediate choice of analysis for me as it is highly influential and says a great deal about what it means to be a lesbian. *The L Word* takes place among the upper echelons of Los Angeles lesbians. The series presents lesbians as mostly White, highly stylized, feminized, sexy socialites. Even those characters somewhat recognizable, though not identified as butch, are attributed feminine characteristics marking them unmistakably as “women.” Moira, the sole butch-identified character, quickly transitions to male prescribing little space for gender fluidity. As the only distinctly lesbian series ever to have aired in North America, lesbians are hungry to see ourselves represented in the mainstream (even if our representation is sorely limited). Almost every lesbian I know has seen the program, regardless of race, class, politics or even whether they own their own television. Moreover, even those who have not seen *The L Word* seem to understand pop culture references to the show. Quite simply, *The L Word* has pervaded the lesbian psyche and become part of lesbian discourse. For these reasons, *The L Word* has far reaching influence in constructing subjectivity within diverse lesbian communities. My intention was to analyse whether this program propagates neo-liberal ideals, making normal certain lesbian subjectivities, while at the same time surreptitiously providing instruction for how not to behave.

Despite the relative homogeneity of *The L Word's* main characters, by actively searching out butch we are able to find several characters that make interesting examples of the disappearance of butch. As a character who is frequently read as butch while at the same refusing a butch

identity and appearing in ways stereotypically perceived as feminine, Shane does a great deal to disappear butch. She is attributed with behaviours commonly associated with men but in ways that tend to be negative. Moreover Shane is not allowed to be butch in the ways that most lesbians understand it. She is not ascribed stereotypically butch attributes such as skill in fixing things or gentlemanly behaviour, but is instead depicted as a player. While physically presenting as very feminine, the character Papi is similarly depicted as a Casanova of sorts. Other intimated butch characters include Tasha and Bette.

I wanted to trace the evolution of a character, analyzing the instructions they provide about lesbian subjectivity and gender, from their initial introduction through till their last scene. For practical reasons it did not seem feasible to do this with Shane (she plays a central role throughout the entire series) and the roles of the other pseudo-butch characters were either too small (not surprisingly; as women of colour Papi and Tasha function to shore up the centrality of the mainly White characters) or in the case of Bette perhaps not as exemplary of butch's disappearance.

My data analysis follows the character Moira Sweeney from the time she is introduced in season three of *The L Word*, through to the final season and Moira's subsequent gender transition to Max. I chose to study Moira/Max because the character initially identifies as butch (as mentioned, she is the sole butch-identified character), is only introduced half way through the series, and because I believe the character strongly exemplifies how butch is being made to disappear. Furthermore, the way in which butch is disappeared via this character, mirrors closely the *DSM's* instructions for normative gender.

I chose to also analyse the *DSM-IV-TR* diagnosis Gender Identity Disorder (GID) to investigate my suspicion that in very different contexts, these two texts do the same work of

disciplining lesbian subjectivity. Weedon (1997) points out that “[i]n order to be effective and powerful, a discourse needs a material base in established social institutions and practices” (p. 96). As the leading authority on mental illness, the *DSM* defines and distinguishes “normal” from pathological. The *GID* diagnosis effectively renders butch subjectivity degenerate. It prescribes gender reassignment or therapy designed to assist the nonconforming individual to adhere more closely to the gender binary. As the recognized and widely used authority on mental illness, I believe the *DSM* has far reaching implications in constructing normative and non-normative identity. Common sense understanding about sex and gender rely on the *DSM* for legitimacy and authority. Regardless of whether viewers are specifically aware of *GID*, it constructs knowledge and power relations through discourse. Moreover, without the *DSM* there would be no common understanding of “disorder” or of “treatment.” The *DSM* provides authoritative backing to *The L Word*’s portrayal of gender as naturally binary. In doing so, the rationality of the gender-conforming subject is reaffirmed.

Conclusion

Through scrutinizing the discourses in operation, my intention is to uncover power relations and their material affects. Specifically, I aim to reveal how the appeal of neo-liberalism discursively instructs lesbian/queer subjectivity. Central to this is a deconstruction of the prior knowledge needed for the discourses to cohere or make sense, and the discursive strategies of inclusion and exclusion. In addition, I wish to explore my suspicion that the *DSM*’s *GID*, and *The L Word* work in concert to discipline lesbian/queer subjectivity in accordance with binary conceptions of gender. Using bio-power as a lens for exploration, my method of analysis intends to expose

those discourses that reaffirm a heteronormative ontology through the valorization of gender conformity and the denigration of butch.

Chapter Four: A Genealogy of Butch

As outlined in my Methodology, the purpose of a genealogy is to demonstrate how a particular set of conditions came to be. In the context of this thesis, the current conditions of butch existence are built upon the discourses that constructed, allowed for or delimited past butch subjectivities. Understanding this history provides clues to discerning how relations of power currently disappear butch.

As a “history of the present,” my genealogical analysis in this chapter documents the conditions of butch existence in North America. My intention is not to examine butches per se, but rather the contingencies that have both allowed for and delimited butch subjectivity. I begin my analysis by tentatively exploring what it has meant and what it now means to be butch. Because of the historical conflation of sex, gender and sexual orientation, there exists a strong connection between dominant understanding of homosexuality and what the psychiatric establishment has currently termed gender identity disorder (GID). Such discourses have profound implications for lesbian/queer subjectivity. For this reason, I go on to provide a brief history of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder's (DSM)* diagnosis of homosexuality and its subsequent creation of GID. Beginning in the present and working backwards to the 1940s (when butches emerged as more visible in the public realm), I then begin tracing the conditions of butch existence. Following this, I discuss the historical and current role of butch within lesbian communities and society at large and the ways in which butch challenges both hetero and homonormativity. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of my genealogical observations noting how the various social and political conditions discursively construct butch.

What is a Butch?

Butch, dyke, diesel dyke, bull dyke, bull dagger, stud, stone butch, truck driver, hard dresser, he/she, manly woman, tom boy, lesbian – these labels have at different times been in circulation producing both discursive and material effects. They have been used to define and often to denigrate masculine appearing women (Allison, 1967; Grahn, 1984; Lamos, 1994). Late 19th and early 20th century medical writings and sexologists understood homosexuality as a congenital disease of inversion (Allison, 1967; Caprio, 1954; Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Foreshadowing the introduction of GID, lesbians were thought to have “the body of one sex but the mind and soul of the opposite sex” (Caprio, 1954, p. 105). By the 1950s lesbianism was regarded as a psychogenic or environmentally determined “illness” (Caprio, 1954). Lesbian desire was most often psychiatrically attributed to a woman’s unresolved attachment to her father (commonly regarded as the “Electra Complex”), as well as a poor relationship with her mother (Caprio, 1954). Throughout this history the masculine woman was commonly understood as defining lesbianism (Allison, 1967; Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Lamos, 1994; O’Sullivan, 1994).

In constructing butch subjectivity, such discourses have been both resisted and appropriated by butch identified lesbians (Grahn, 1984; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Lamos, 1994; MacGowan, 1992). Moreover, what defines butch continues to have multiple significance (Rubin, 1992). As MacGowan (1992) contends, “Butch-femme is simultaneously both a straight image we apply to ourselves as a joke and a visible part of the lives of historical lesbians whose real fame we use to justify our existence” (p. 315). Emerging in North America’s working class, lesbian bar scene, butch subjectivity is both culturally and historically specific (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, Rubin, 1992). While there is some debate as to whether butch is essential to one’s being or, to use

Butler's (1990) term performative, I contend that butch is at least influenced if not constructed by the discourses available to us. As I demonstrate, it has shifted over time and is frequently contested.

History suggests that identity-based politics and identity claims should be approached with caution. Indeed, essentialized notions of women have been fiercely and rightly critiqued by women of colour and working class women for reflecting only the experiences of middle-class, White women and for presenting such experiences as universal. As I have argued however, essentialism is not a justification to abandon identity altogether. Rather than rejecting identity or refusing to make generalizations about what constitutes butch identity for fear of oversimplifying, misrepresenting or essentializing, I believe it to be politically more useful to cautiously explore the meaning(s) of butch identity. With this in mind, I endeavour an exploration of some of the more common understanding of what it has meant and means to take up butch identity while at the same time acknowledging that such generalizations are both limited and imperfect.

While dominant discourses have tended to equate all lesbianism with butch identity, lesbian communities have historically been far from homogenous (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Newton, 1993). Emerging out of working class culture and bars in particular, butch and butch/femme relationships have historically been markers of social class and ethnic stratification (Chamberland, 1996; Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993, Newton, 1993).

Within queer literature there appears to be consensus that butch identity denotes masculine characteristics and is often representative of one's approach to sex and relationships (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993, Nestle, 1992b; Rubin, 1993). While prescriptions for butch appearance have changed over time, butches have consistently been recognized as

lesbians who have a masculine appearance. Historically, lesbians who were perceived as butchiest were those associated with the lower class (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Often these women were pejoratively referred to as diesel dykes or bull daggers. According to Kennedy and Davis (1993), masculine African American lesbians commonly used the term stud to define themselves.

Historically, to be butch meant to be attracted to femmes. In the 1940s butch/femme couples became the visible norm of lesbian relationships (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, Nestle, 1992a). Until the 1960s, they remained a distinguishing part of lesbian community and butch identity. Butches were constructed as the physically active partner and leader in lovemaking (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Nestle, 1992b). This was particularly true in the 1950s when butch roles were rigidly defined in terms of sexual aggression. While butch/butch relationships certainly have and continue to exist, they have been far less acknowledged (Califia, 1994; Feinberg, 1993). There was a strict expectation at this time that butches be solely attracted to femmes as well as an expectation of being a stone butch or untouchable (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). The term stone butch referred to both a tendency and an expectation that butches not desire sexual touching and in particular, penetrative sex. Butches often describe their sexual pleasure as coming from the pleasure they give to their femme (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Nestle, 1992b). Although more often contested and less rigidly imposed, the connection between butch identity and desire for femmes remains today.

In the 1940s and fifties butches tended to describe their identity in more essentialist terms, as “who they are” (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Kennedy and Davis (1993) contend that “Butch identity was deeply felt internally, something that marked the person as different...” (p. 326). While some butches continue to understand their identity this way, butch is increasingly

described within academic literature as performative (Butler, 1990, 1996; Eves, 2004; Halberstam, 1998; J.B. Noble, 2004; Rubin, 1992). Nestle (1992a) and Cordova (interviewed by Burana, 1994) on the other hand have described butch identity as a distinct gender in and of itself.

While butch identity is strongly connected to masculinity, Grahn (1984), Halberstam (1998), Kennedy and Davis (1993), Lamos, (1994), Nestle (1992b), Ngyuen (2008) and Rubin (1992) distinguish it from standard societal roles for men. Rather than simply mimicking hegemonic masculinity, Rubin (1992) argues that butch is “a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through the deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols” (p. 467). Such codes are manipulated through the female appropriation of masculinity. The seeming incongruency of masculinity performed by a female body destabilizes the supposed realness of male masculinity.

The DSM: Homosexuality and Gender Identity Disorder

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* is the leading authority of psychiatric disorders in North America and is highly influential in the diagnosis of mental illness worldwide. “[O]ften referred to as the ‘bible’ of psychiatry” (Rudacille, 2005, p. 192), the *DSM* defines, classifies and dictates criteria for more than three hundred psychiatric diagnoses. The authoritative power of the *DSM* extends far beyond the patient/therapist relationship. Relied on “by courts, schools and social agencies in making decisions about matters as varied as child custody, criminal liability, placement in special education classes, and receipt of Social Security benefits” (Rudacille, 2005, p. 192) the *DSM* functions “as a kind of dictionary of psychopathologies” (p. 194). Moreover, a *DSM* diagnosis is critical for American citizens

seeking insurance reimbursement for mental health treatment and for Canadians wanting gender reassignment surgery or government disability benefits from welfare. The *DSM* is thus a powerful mechanism in disciplining and constructing “normal” behavior.

The *DSM* has played a particular role in disciplining queer subjectivities. Homosexuality remained in the *DSM* until 1974 (Rudacille, 2005; Wilson, 1998; Zucker & Spitzer, 2005). Shortly thereafter it briefly appeared again (and remained until 1987) in the form of ego-dystonic homosexuality, a diagnosis that applied to queer individuals who were unhappy with their sexuality (Rudacille, 2005; Wilson, 1998; Zucker & Spitzer, 2005). Seven years after homosexuality was removed as a category of disorder, a revised form of sexual and gender deviance appeared in the *DSM*. Rather than normative gender object desire, these new diagnoses emphasized normative gender presentation. The *DSM III* (1980) included two diagnoses pertaining to what medical experts term “gender dysphoria” (Rudacille, 2005; Zucker & Spitzer, 2005). In 1987, the two diagnoses, Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood (GIDC) and Transsexualism (the adult version of GIDC) came to also include a third diagnosis, Gender Identity Disorder of Adolescence or Adulthood, non-transsexual type (GIDAANT) (Rudacille, 2005; Zucker & Spitzer, 2005). The *DSM-IV* choose to delete this third category, opting instead to combine its diagnostic criteria with those of GIDC and Transsexualism into one diagnosis, Gender Identity Disorder (GID) (Rudacille, 2005; Zucker & Spitzer, 2005). This change is reflected in the current *DSM-IV-TR*.

Key components of the *DSM-IV-TR* GID diagnosis in both children and adults are “strong and persistent cross-gender identification” and a “persistent discomfort with his or her sex and sense of appropriateness in the gender role of that sex” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). To warrant a diagnosis, these “symptoms” must further cause “clinically significant distress or

impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning” (APA, 2000). As Rudacille (2005) points out, this criterion captures far more people than did the diagnosis of Transsexualism.

In shifting the focus from an expressed desire to change sex to cross-gender identification, distress, and impairment in functioning, the new diagnosis encompasses not only the relatively few individuals who desire sex reassignment, but also the far greater number who are perceived by themselves or *by others* to express some form of gender variance (Rudacille, 2005, p. 197, italics in original).

Implicit within the *DSM* is an assumption that gender is binary (meaning that there are but two categories of gender) and essential to one’s being. Repeated use of the words “other sex” makes explicit the assertion that there are not more than two genders and two sexes. The *DSM* takes the categories male and female for granted, both assuming and (re)producing them as discrete and dichotomous classifications. Implicit in this discourse is an assumption that male and female behaviours, roles, feelings and desires are distinct and mutually exclusive.

Masculinity and femininity are presumed to naturally and unambiguously coincide with the sexual characteristics one is born with. More specifically, only those with penises are expected and allowed to behave in accordance with dominant discourses of masculinity. Conversely and more strictly enforced, behaviours designated as feminine are solely reserved and expected for those with vulvas. *GID* takes for granted and makes normal appropriate codes of gendered conduct. It presumes and reconstitutes masculinity and masculine behaviour as naturally belonging to men and boys.

Rather than merely pieces of cloth worn on the body, references to gendered attire assume and make natural clothing as actually imbued with maleness or femaleness. Based on colonial

and patriarchal social mores, the *DSM* assumes shared perceptions of what constitutes stereotypical or normal behaviour. For males indicators of “normal” include desiring “stereotypically male” clothing, male toys, games and activities, and “rough and tumble play” (APA, 2000). Conversely women and girls are expected to naturally want to behave in ways that are considered feminine, such as desiring “stereotypically female” clothing and sitting to pee (APA, 2000). According to the *DSM*, deviating from the binary system of gender by wearing clothes associated with the “other sex,” consistently behaving in a manner associated with the “other sex,” or preferring play associated with “the other sex” constitutes “cross-gender” behavior and as such is indicative of disorder. Moreover, GID assumes that there are clearly demarcated and identifiable feelings associated with male and female sexual characteristics.

Interestingly, the GID diagnosis acknowledges the social construction of certain gendered attributes by its use of the term “stereotypical” to describe “masculine clothing,” “games and pastimes”, and in the term “normative feminine clothing.” However its emphasis on gender nonconformity as pathologically deviant reifies gender roles as natural, thereby effectively undermining any notion that normative gender behaviour, roles and clothing are only thus because we make them so.

The *DSM* does not distinguish whether it is the disorder that causes stress or if stress is caused by social stigma, ostracism and harassment rooted in strict gender binaries. As Rudacille (2005) points out, “Prostitution, HIV risk, suicide attempts, and substance abuse are described as associated features of GID, when in truth they are the consequences of discrimination and undeserved shame” (p. 210). Rigidly constructing normative gender, the *DSM* in effect discursively produces “disordered” individuals as well as the conditions which cause “distress or impairment.”

The *DSM-IV-TR* continues to perpetuate narrow, sexist assumptions about gender roles and behaviours for both males and females. While the *DSM* acknowledges that boys are more frequently referred for GID evaluation and are held to a higher degree of gender conformity, GID reinforces this very phenomenon. Ignoring the sexism and violence often instilled in “rough-and-tumble play”, “stereotypically male toys and games”, and “normative feminine clothing” (APA, 2000), GID takes for granted not only that these are “normal” pursuits indicative of healthy child development, but that these behaviours are also desirable.

While the current *DSM* now emphasizes gender deviance rather than sexual deviance, the ideology underlying these conceptions is remarkably similar. In fact, early theories about lesbianism discursively mirror today’s GID. Sexologists such as Ulrichs, Westphal, Krafft-Ebing, and Lombroso observed “inappropriate” sex role behaviour as characteristic of lesbians (Caprio, 1954; Faderman, 1991; Halberstam, 1998). Considered a congenital affliction particular to the lower classes, prisoners and those deemed mentally ill, female masculinity was believed to be characteristic of lesbianism or “the disease of inversion” (Caprio, 1954). The contemporary discourse that a masculine presentation on a female body is indicative of being in the “wrong body” is clearly evident in the 1869 writing of Westphal, a German psychiatrist who described one of his young patients as “really a man trapped in a woman’s body” (cited in Faderman, 1991, p. 41). Moreover as Faderman (1991) comments, “[t]o Westphal and the sexologists who came after him, the romantic interests of women like this one were inextricably linked to what the sexologists saw as their masculine behavior and their conception of themselves as male” (p. 41). Believed to be trapped in the wrong body, sexologists understood lesbians as wanting to be men. It is thus no coincidence that the butch who was formally considered to have suffered from sexual inversion has now come to meet the medical definition of GID.

Fear that deviant expressions of gender are markers of homosexuality continue to characterize the disciplining of gender normativity. Indeed because sexism and homophobia rely on each other, desiring an “opposite” gender object is compulsory to successfully “doing” your gender identity. Moreover, dominant discourses continue to equate a subversive gender presentation with being queer. The current *DSM* notes that children, and girls in particular, diagnosed with *GID* frequently display same sex interest in adulthood (APA, 2000). The discourse of the *DSM-IV-TR* suggests that measures to cure children with *GID* reflect a fear of same sex attraction. Boys for example, who are not interested in “rough and tumble play” are both pathologized by the *DSM* and viewed as “sissies” or “faggots” within dominant discourses.

Homosexuality, once the diagnosis given to children and adults who failed to perform their “appropriate” gender, has, in my view, regardless of intention been replaced by *GID*. Zucker and Spitzer (2005) reveal that some therapists have explicitly “cited prevention of homosexuality” as a treatment goal for their “cross-gender-identified children” (p. 33). They further contend that there is a clear evidence that “some clinicians offer treatment to children with *GID*, in part, to prevent homosexuality or that some parents request treatment, in part, for the same reason” (Zucker & Spitzer, 2005, p. 36). Indicative that homosexuality continues to be policed, albeit under a different banner, the current *DSM* notes that boys diagnosed with *GID* in childhood are far more likely as adults to identify as gay men than as transsexuals or cross-dressers (APA, 2000). As Wilson (1998) observes, “American psychiatric perceptions of etiology, distress, and treatment goals for transgendered people are remarkably parallel to those for gay and lesbian people before the declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973” (p. 13). That little has changed leaves Rudacille (2005) to conclude, “the core of the

diagnosis remains the same: the individual is not a ‘normal’ male or female, and his or her deviance from the norm is conceived as illness or pathology” (p. 197).

It is important to stress that, in outlining the ways in which gender identity and sexual orientation have been and continue to be conflated, that my point is not to argue that it should be otherwise. On the contrary, since the removal of homosexuality from the *DSM*, I have witnessed a growing homophobic desire on the part of gays and lesbians to demarcate sexual desire from gender identity. Within certain lesbian communities there is a propensity to distance as much as possible from the working class, ugly image of butch. Similarly, LeVay (1996, cited in Rudacille, 2005) notes within contemporary gay and lesbian communities an “overcorrection” (p. 161) of “excessive denial” (p. 161) of the association between gender non-conformity and homosexuality. He further argues that this attitude is most overt with gay men where there is a definite “femmephobia in the gay male community, generally a dislike of men who seem feminine” (LeVay, 1996, cited in Rudacille, 2005, p. 161). Such distancing in my view serves to further perpetuate and uphold homophobia and sexism.

The Contemporary Butch – 2000 and on

I perceive a definite move away from butch within lesbian and queer communities. Butch and femme identities appear to have become passé among most young lesbians. Some of this likely relates to the recent trend of formerly butch identified women who are now using medical technologies to transition into men – a move which I view as reproducing the gender binary (albeit perhaps for some unintentionally). There seems to be little written about butch today and what is written is often conflated with trans masculinity (Halberstam, 1998, 2005; J.B. Noble,

2004). Moreover, literature related to queer masculinity that was once discussed in the context of butch identity seems more frequently replaced by an emphasis on FTM trans.

In addition to the implications of the trans phenomenon on butch identity, I also question whether reticence in claiming butch identity relates to a broader disavowal of identity politics in general. In my observations, it appears that young women today tend to not feel a connection to the past and frequently take for granted the freedoms they enjoy today. It would seem that homophobia (like feminism), feels to many a thing of the past, thus there just isn't the necessity for identity politics there once was. Moreover, in these post-modern times there appears to be a reluctance to take up identity claims for fear of feeling essentialized and boxed in.

Like their middle class sisters of the decades past, it seems to me that many lesbians today are more interested in assimilating into straight society than maintaining a distinctly queer culture. The media moreover, seem to suggest that to "be a lesbian" today, is to (at least) aspire to all of the trappings of White, middle or upper class, heteronormativity. Television shows such as *The L Word* present butches (to lesbian audiences) as beautiful lipstick lesbians with slightly masculine characteristics. So long as you don't look like a man-hating, angry lesbian, it is now almost cool to be "gay," particularly if you're still sexually available to men. Capitalist and neo-liberal ideologies further contribute to the commodification of beauty and middle and upper class individualistic aspirations among young lesbians.

Writing in 1993, Rubin posits,

On the one hand, the new lesbianism deconstructs the old, perhaps overly politicized or prescriptive notion of lesbianism by refusing ghettoization, acknowledging internal group differences, and affirming the value of individual choice when it comes to style and political and sexual expression. On the other hand, it comes perilously close to

depoliticizing lesbian identity and perpetuating our invisibility by failing, frequently, to name itself to others (p. 437).

I would argue that Rubin's concerns are perhaps more relevant in 2011. As she suggests, the consequences of such de-politicization include a return to pre-1940s lesbian invisibility, albeit this time couched in terms of tolerance and acceptability. The danger of this shift towards assimilation not only results in lesbian invisibility but simultaneously renders heterosexism invisible. Without a shared political identity from which to organize against heterosexism, lesbians are at risk of being subsumed and appropriated by straight culture. As hooks (1992) argues, "Communities of resistance are replaced by communities of consumption" (p. 33). Moreover, as lesbianism becomes increasingly apolitical (the label being simply a referent to who one has sex with/desires), its historical allegiances to working class culture, interracial socializing and feminism fall by the way side.

Butch in the 1970s, 80s and 90s

In the 1970s and continuing into the eighties, butch/femme lesbian identities came under attack. Lesbian feminists (who were primarily White and middle-class) denounced femme and butch gender identities charging that such identities and relationships mimicked heterosexual relationships, perpetuated stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity and upheld male dominance and female subordination (Case, 1993; Faderman, 1991; Feinberg, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Lamos, 1994; Nestle, 1992a, 1992b; O'Sullivan, 1994; Ross, 1995). Maleness and masculinity were equated with women's oppression and femmes were viewed as victims to the patriarchy (Feinberg, 1993; Nestle, 1992a). Butch and femme lesbians were seen as traitors to the feminist movement.

In their book *Lesbian/Woman*, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon (1972) proudly describe the first lesbian rights organization in the United States, Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Responding to the homophobia of the time, the mission of DOB was to make lesbians more acceptable to dominant culture by eradicating butch/femme behavior, roles and dress (Case, 1993; Martin & Lyon, 1972). Suggestive of their own ageism and class bias, Martin and Lyon (1972) write, “The minority of lesbians who still cling to the traditional male-female or husband-wife pattern in their partnerships are more than likely old-timers, gay bar habituées or working class women” (p. 77). Lesbian feminism was highly influential in coercing butches and femmes to adopt an androgynous appearance or move underground (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; O’Sullivan, 1994; Queen, 1994). Thus, one could continue to look butch, so long as she renounced butch identity and gender roles (O’Sullivan, 1994; Queen, 1994).

Resisting 1970s lesbian feminism, Joan Nestle and subsequent feminist writers such as Amber Hollibaugh, Cherrie Moraga, and Gayle Rubin initiated a resurgence in eighties and nineties butch and femme subjectivities (Carter & Noble, 1996). Hamer, Budge (1994) and Stein (1992) suggest however that the reappearance of butch/femme was more about playing with style and power than necessity or politics. Moreover, Stein (1992) argues that the revival of butch/femme was a response to the anti-style uniform prescribed by lesbian feminism.

Lesbian feminists responded to the renewed visibility of butch/femme lesbians by once again loudly condemning them. Butch/femme relationships were viewed as mimicking heterosexual roles and as such were considered antithetical to feminist aims (Case, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Jeffreys, 1993, 2003, Jo, Strega & Ruston, 1990). Pointing to the most extreme examples of heterosexual role playing, Jeffreys (1993, 2003) for example, asserted that butch/femme relationships reproduced power dynamics based upon dominance and submission. She further

argued that butch/femme relationships were imbued with abuses of power and more likely to result in physical violence. Equating masculinity with male dominance, Jeffreys views butch women (and FTM transsexuals) as oppositional to women's liberation.

At the same time that lesbian feminism renounced butch/femme, dominant culture continued to equate lesbianism with butch, lumping them together as anti-men, anti-sex and anti-fashion. Commenting on "the caricature lesbian whipping girl, the one who serves as the repository of mainstream hatred and fear of feminism's 'excesses'" O'Sullivan (1994) observes,

Besides the flannel shirt (which in fact has been an androgynous item for many decades), she is often portrayed as an old fashioned bull-dagger butch. She is 'mannish' but not at all stylish and at the same time she is definitely a woman. Therefore she has to be ugly – in words, butch (p. 85).

1960s Butch

Within a context of rising conservatism and increased repression against gays, lesbians and trans people, the 1940s, fifties and sixties incited significant social change and political uprising in both Canada and the United States. Published in 1963, Betty Friedan's groundbreaking feminist book *The Feminine Mystique* significantly challenged women's place in the patriarchal home, provoking feminist discourse and activism. The birth control pill became available in 1960 providing women increased sexual autonomy. In addition, the civil rights movement, the peace movement and the burgeoning gay rights movement which ignited the 1969 Stonewall Riots all threatened to disrupt White supremacy and hegemonic heterosexuality. While this period saw the emergence of progressive social change, these events appeared in resistance to the increasing persecution and harassment and of gays, lesbians and trans people. As D'Emilio (1993) notes,

“Although gay community was a precondition for a mass movement, the oppression of lesbians and gay men was the force that propelled the movement into existence” (p. 472).

Bar raids, police confrontations, police entrapment (particularly of gay men in American cities), queer witch hunts, and a general sense of unrest characterized the 1960s (D’Emilio, 1993; Kinsman, 1987; Samels, Davis & Heilbroner, 2010). Believed to be directly associated with communism or an easy target for blackmail, those labeled as “homosexual” were considered a “national security risk” (Kinsman, 1987; Samels et al., 2010). In both Canada and the United States hundreds of civil servants believed to be “homosexual” were fired from their jobs on the basis of sexual orientation (Kinsman, 1987). The military systematically sought to identify and expel gays and lesbians (D’Emilio, 1993; Faderman, 1991; Kinsman, 1987), the FBI surveilled gay and lesbian organization such as DOB and the Mattachine Society (D’Emilio, 1993; Faderman, 1991), and in Canada the RCMP fired all known homosexuals (Kinsman, 1987).

The social conditions of the 1960s had a dire effect on the working class lesbian bar scene. Chamberland (1996) explains that working class, mixed clubs in Montreal offering entertainment began to disappear and were replaced by women only discotheques. Unlike the bars formerly located in the red light districts, the new discotheques moved into predominantly English, well-to-do areas of town. Chamberland (1996) explains,

Dress codes (e.g., no jeans) as well as rules of conduct once inside were enforced to give the appearance of a clean, respectable, middle-class establishment...All of these factors helped to create a new clientele composed of secretaries, technicians, teachers, nurses, and other professionals as well as artists, students, and activists (p. 359).

Unlike other authors writing about this period, Chamberland (1996) interprets this change in location as indicative of a less repressive period for gays and lesbians. However, while it can be

argued that the presence of lesbian bars in more well to do areas of town is a sign of progression (particularly in the 1960s), it is important to note that only a particular type of bar, (i.e.: White, middle-class) was allowed. Moreover, while upper-class lesbian establishments began to emerge, working class lesbian bars closed their doors.

Kennedy and Davis (1993) similarly note the closure of all popular working class lesbian bars in Buffalo. They write, “Rockefeller’s antivice campaign in Buffalo led to the constant harassment of bars by the State Liquor Authority, and created a grim period for lesbian social life (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. 145). Moreover Kennedy and Davis (1993) add that “[t]he pressure on gay bars was so great during the 1960s that at times there were periods without any bars at all” (p. 149). In trying to maintain lesbian space, both Chamberland (1996) and Kennedy and Davis (1993) note that butches and femmes took a lead role. Butches often initiated negotiations with bar owners to make their bars lesbian friendly (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). At other times, they took over bars physically fighting straight men to do so (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

It would seem that the increasing repression of the late 1960s which resulted in the closure of many working class lesbian bars, contributed to the erosion of working class bar culture, challenged the cohesion of butch/femme communities, and added to the vulnerability of butch/femme relationships to the attacks of lesbian feminists in the early 1970s.

1950s Butch

Butch identity, butch/femme relationships and the working class bar scene expanded during the 1950s, establishing itself firmly as integral to working class lesbian culture. Notable changes during this period included a rigidification of the butch role and of butch/femme relationships, greater class integration of White and Black American lesbians, and increased class stratification

between working class lesbians and upwardly mobile lesbians who tended to shun butch/femme roles (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

Expectations about what constituted proper butch behaviour and appearance became more rigid (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Butches were expected to adhere to strict roles and code of dress. Modeled after rock musicians of the time, T-shirts, jeans and greased back DA's¹ were a popular look among White working class bar butches (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

Kennedy and Davis (1993) comment,

Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and later in the decade a young Elvis Presley, with their slicked back hair, pouty lips in a slight sneer and a smoldering look about the eyes, all became models. Many butches developed a style that was at once tough and erotically enticing; simultaneously careless and intense (p. 159).

American authors such as Grahn (1984), Kennedy and Davis (1993), and Nestle (1992b) agree that while both Black and White bar butches of this time cultivated very masculine appearances, their goal was not to pass as men. Grahn (1984) recalls, "We dikes did not want to be taken for men and were insulted and ashamed (I certainly was anyhow) when someone said we were 'trying to be men' or when a clerk called me "Sir" (p. 31). Chronicling the life of the 1920s and thirties Black butch performer Gladys Bentley, James Wilson (2010) similarly writes,

Bentley did not try to 'pass' as a man, nor did she playfully try to deceive her audience into believing she was biologically male. Instead, she exerted a 'black female masculinity,' to use Judith Halberstam's terminology, that troubled the distinctions between black and white and masculine and feminine. Through her manipulation of gender and racial identities, she demonstrated the constraints of those cultural boundaries (p. 172-173).

¹ DA, short for a duck's ass, referred to a popular men's hairstyle in the fifties that looked like a duck's tail.

In the same way, butch narrators in the interviews conducted by Kennedy and Davis (1993) described their desire to acquire male characteristics while not being male. Rather Kennedy and Davis (1992) posit, “Butch appearance reflected (the) ambiguous relationship between masculinity and queerness” (p. 71). Those women who did try to pass as men were not seen as members of butch/femme communities (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Moreover, most butches retained female pronouns, female or unisex names and often took up nicknames that were not specifically male (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

This perspective contrasts with the Montreal bar scene described by Chamberland (1996). Examining the francophone bar scene in Montreal from 1955 to 1975, Chamberland (1996) notes that some butches did try to pass as men. Although she identifies violence against butches as a common occurrence, Chamberland (1996) is unclear whether passing was used strategically as a safety measure on the street or if it was adopted by butch identified women within the context of lesbian communities. She observes however that masculine nouns and pronouns were adopted; “thus, one said un butch, not une butch and il (he), not elle (she)” (Chamberland, 1996, p. 354). Further Chamberland (1996) contends that some butches “insisted on being addressed as Monsieur (Mister)” (p. 354).

Sexual performance became fundamental to butch identity and butch/femme relationships were the norm (Faderman, 1991; Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Moreover, within the context of the rigid gender roles characteristic of the 1950s more broadly (D’Emilio), butches and femmes were expected to remain consistent in their roles. Butches who transgressed by switching roles were pejoratively called kiki or AC/DC, and faced potential bullying and even physical violence by members of their community (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Butches prided themselves on their prowess to sexually please their partners (Feinberg, 1993;

Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Non-reciprocal sex became a defining feature of butch identity. Thus “real” butches were equated with stone butches (Faderman, 1991; Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Among White lesbians, being “flipped” (Faderman, 1991, p. 169) or “rolled over” (Kennedy & Davis, p. 1993, p. 209) became a term used to pejoratively describe butches who allowed their femme to touch them sexually. Black butches who did this were similarly referred to as “pancakes” (Faderman, 1991, p. 170).

The rigidity with which butchness was enforced within lesbian communities can be explained at least in part by a climate of severe intolerance, repression and violence directed at lesbians as a whole and butches in particular (Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Butch lesbians not only were challenging the sexual mores that enforced heterosexuality but were specifically challenging men’s ownership of masculinity and of women. Adhering to strict codes of conduct was a demonstration of shared identity, solidarity and ultimately one’s right to exist. As Kennedy and Davis (1993) argue, “To deal effectively with the hostility of the straight world, and to support one another in physical confrontations, members of the community developed rules of appropriate behavior and forms of organization and exerted pressure – particularly on butches – to live up to these standards” (p. 194). Internalized feelings of shame, jealousy and insecurity (Feinberg, 1992) were also likely factors in the enforcement of a tough and hyper-masculine image among working class butches.

While the bars offered working class lesbians a shared sense of community cohesion and lesbian culture, they also were places where violence was relatively common (Chamberland, 1996; Faderman, 1991; Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). The tough image that constituted butch identity must be considered within the physical context in which butch and femme lesbians lived their lives. As noted previously, lesbian bars were (and continue to be)

frequently located in the poorest and most dangerous areas of town. They are often located in or near red light districts and areas with higher concentrations of crime (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993, Samels et al., 2010). This is true of both American and Canadian cities where, indicative of their social status, working class lesbians and lesbians of colour are frequently consigned. The threat of violence and homophobic slurs on the street were not unusual, particularly for Black studs who additionally had to confront racism (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). A tough demeanor was necessitated for butches to ensure their own and their femme's physical safety.

Added to the risk of violence more generally, working class lesbians who attended bars faced the additional threat of police harassment and brutality (Chamberland, 1996; Faderman, 1991; Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Hoping to avoid charges of disorderly conduct, bar owners who were often had ties to organized crime, paid bribes for police protection (Chamberland, 1996; Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Samels et al., 2010). This however only reduced rather than eliminated the presence of undercover officers and police raids. Some owners took precautions against raids by only allowing dancing in certain parts of the bar or by scrutinizing the dance floor periodically to ensure enough distance between partners so that a beam of light could pass between them (Faderman, 1991). When police raids occurred, same-sex partners would grab someone of the opposite sex and continue dancing (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Such raids sometimes ended in police brutality including strip searches, and homophobic and sexual slurs (Chamberland, 1996; Faderman, 1991; Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis). Narrators in Kennedy and Davis' (1993) study and respondents in the film *Stonewall Uprising* (Samels et al., 2010) reported that police required women to be wearing at least three pieces of women's clothing. Humiliation, bullying and fear were common police tactics. As in

the previous decade, those arrested continued to face the threat of having their name printed in the daily newspaper (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Chamberland (1996) further notes that “While in jail,” Montreal lesbians “underwent the same medical exam as prostitutes” (p. 357). Not surprisingly, the butch role in the fifties became associated with one’s ability to defend oneself and one’s girlfriend.

Sexist attitudes were present within butch/femme communities at least to some degree (Feinberg, 1993; MacGowan, 1992; Nestle, 1992b) perhaps reflecting ambivalence about being female bodied and queer in a heterosexist, patriarchal society. Both MacGowan (1992) and Nestle (1992b) comment that femmes bore the brunt of such attitudes. There is some evidence however that suggests that butches did not wish to participate in degrading locker room conversations about women, or at least not with men (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Vic, a butch narrator in Kennedy and Davis’ study described quite clearly that she did want to be treated like one of the boys and would not tolerate disrespectful talk about women.

The 1950s became even more class stratified than the forties while, at the same time, more racially integrated (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Kennedy and Davis (1993) report that African American house parties continued to be popular but Black lesbians also interacted with the predominantly White working class lesbian bar scene. More Whites also began attending Black house parties than in the previous decade. According to Kennedy and Davis (1993), working class Black and White butches had more similarities than differences.

Chamberland (1996) similarly notes how the heterogeneous bar culture of the fifties shared a common class consciousness. Bars in Montreal tended towards a mixed clientele comprised of lesbians, gay men, heterosexual couples and single men. Chamberland (1996) posits, “Despite the heterogeneity of the cliques which mingled there, from thugs to effeminate homosexuals and

transvestites, sharing the same territory and the same social ostracism created a sense of belonging which is manifested by the appearance of a definite 'us-versus-them' relationship to the outside world" (p. 358).

There were however marked differences in the lives of working class Black and White lesbians and middle and upper class lesbians (who were primarily White) (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Class distinctions between upwardly mobile lesbians and working class lesbians were apparent in manners, style of dress, and sexual expression (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Working class butches and femmes appeared more overtly sexual, and more recognizable in their style of being butch/femme (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Terms such as "dykes," "bull dykes," "diesel dykes," and "bulldagger" were pejorative terms used to describe women who were very masculine and from the lower class (Allison, 1967; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Newton, 1993). Such words were adopted by both heterosexual culture and upwardly mobile gays and lesbians. Writing about lesbians who attended the summer queer community of Cherry Grove in the late fifties, Newton notes how the "ladies" (mostly financially comfortable WASPs) distinguished themselves from the mostly Jewish and Italian working class "dykes." Intending an ethnic and class slur, the "ladies" referred to the newly arriving groups of working class lesbians as "dykes." But as Newton (1993) comments, "The term 'dyke' was associated primarily with butches..." (p. 529).

According to Faderman (1991), Kennedy and Davis (1993), and Newton (1993), butch/femme relationships were frequently viewed with condemnation and disdain by upwardly mobile lesbians seeking to distance themselves from the crassness associated with the working class and working class lesbians particularly. Termed as part of the homophile movement, the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) emerged in the United States in the 1950s.

Reflecting middle-class leadership and aspirations, these groups emphasized the need for gays and lesbians to assimilate and achieve respectability through education (of themselves and the public at large) (Faderman, 1991; Kinsman, 1987). Internalizing the conservatism and severe repression of the times, Mattachine and DOB sought to prove that gays and lesbians were “normal” people (Faderman, 1991; Kinsman, 1987). Middle class butches shunned overt butch/femme aesthetics, toned down their butchness, and were less flamboyant than working class butches (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

In contrast, working class lesbians, and butches in particular, moved towards ending the double life by seeking greater visibility (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Commenting on the dissimilar survival approaches of upwardly mobile lesbians, Kennedy and Davis (1993) remark, “Its (sic) culture and strategies of resistance were entirely different” (p. 115).

Working class lesbians frequented some of the same bars as upwardly mobile lesbians, however the reverse was not true (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Moreover in middle-class bars they remained segregated (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). The younger “tough” lesbians kept to the back of the bar while the more affluent, status conscious lesbians stayed in the front and frequently kept company with gay men (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Gay men offered protection to professional lesbians that working class lesbians did not want while at the same time however it was common for butches to protect effeminate gay men in the bars (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

1940s Butch

Kennedy and Davis (1993) document how the changing social milieu for women generally fostered the emergence of a butch identity and the development of lesbian culture. World War II

marked a significant shift in the lives of American women. The requirements of war brought women into the workforce like never before. Women were needed to fill the workplace void left by men who went off to war. It became not uncommon for women to move out of the private sphere and participate in life outside the home. Moreover, as income earners, women began to enjoy a more social, public life.

Women's entry into the workforce and factories in particular marked an important change in acceptable dress for women (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Women could now wear pants and could easily purchase them off the rack in the "ladies" department. Up to this point, women's attire had been limited to skirts and dresses. Women who preferred a more masculine style of dress had only been able to do so in the privacy of their homes and even then, were frequently limited by the presence of family members.

D'Emilio (1993) also describes World War II as pivotal in the creation of lesbian and gay communities. He argues,

It [WWII] plucked millions of young men and women, whose sexual identities were just forming, out of their homes, out of towns and small cities, out of the heterosexual environment of the family, and dropped them into sex-segregated situations – as GIs, as WACs, and WAVEs, in same-sex rooming houses for women workers who relocated to seek employment. The war freed millions of men and women from the settings where heterosexuality was normally imposed.

Within the Canadian context Kinsman (1987) similarly notes that World War II "had a major effect on the social fabric of Canadian life" (p. 109) and led to the expansion of lesbian and gay culture. He describes the war as significant to women's entrance into the paid work force such

that women's presence in the public sphere was perceived by those on the Right as a threat to the preservation of the heterosexual family.

Women's relegation to work in the home meant that prior to World War II the majority of women were economically dependant on men (D'Emilio, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Kinsman, 1987). Thus, the war provided women the possibility of independence and greater autonomy. Moreover, changes in dress and the increase of women in the public sphere, made lesbians less easy to identify (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). It became less unusual for women to go to bars and restaurants alone allowing lesbians opportunities to socialize together and create communities (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

Prior to the 1940s lesbian culture had been more fragmented. Bars that catered to lesbians were well established in New York City but not in smaller cities throughout the United States (Hankin, 2002; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Moreover, bars were understood as the domain of men and women were not generally welcome (Chamberland, 1996; Hankin, 2002; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Consistent with lesbian bars in general, the few that catered to lesbians were in seedier areas of towns and were dangerous for unescorted women (Chamberland, 1996; Hankin, 2002; Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

The 1940s saw the establishment of gay and lesbian bars for women in American cities (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Weekend socializing in bars became particularly common for White working class lesbians and became central to the development of working class lesbian culture (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Bars were the only public space for working class lesbians to congregate and provided much needed respite from the isolation and oppression they experienced as lesbians (Hankin, 2002; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Moreover, lesbian bars became essential to resistance. They fostered social cohesion and group consciousness, offering

working class lesbians community and solidarity in a hostile world (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

As Kennedy and Davis (1993) note, “That lesbians were able to come together and build community in bars is a testimony to their tenacity, their drive to find others like themselves, and their desire for erotic relations with other women” (p. 31).

Cultivated within the bar scene, the 1940s also marked the emergence of what came to be a more formalized culture in terms of butch/femme relationships and identities. Many butches worked in factories or other kinds of labour and could maintain a look consistent with their identities all of the time (Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Others who worked in offices or more stereotypical jobs continued to wear skirts and makeup to work, while preferring a more masculine style of dress in the evenings and on weekends (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Starched shirts became the Saturday night norm for butches (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

Different expectations regarding sexual expression for butches and femmes became established. Butches were expected to be sexually “aggressive” and although social mores of the period precluded open discussions about sex there was a shared assumption that femmes would not reciprocate in lovemaking (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Speaking about how such expectations were communicated one butch narrator in Kennedy and Davis’ (1993) study concluded that it was “just their (butch) attitude I guess” (p. 197). Unlike the decade that followed however, deviation was not censured or stigmatized. A lavender butch was a self-identified femmy-butch and was not considered a pejorative term (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Moreover, words such as stone butch and untouchable were not in favour till the 1950s.

The 1940s bar culture was fairly homogenous in terms of class and race (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Middle class lesbians did not go to bars for fear of being found out and upper class lesbians saw it beneath themselves to socialize with members of the working class (Faderman,

1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). According to Kennedy and Davis (1993), gay bar regulars were primarily White and working class with only a few (working class) Native American and African American patrons. They offer three reasons to account for this racial segregation. At the time racial tensions were such that Black lesbians were more likely to be targeted for “disorderly conduct.” Such overt racism precluded the existence of a Black lesbian bar. Secondly, the Black community was not large enough at the time to provide anonymity to Black lesbians. Finally, house parties, rent parties and buffet flats were well established forms of socialization for Black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. They continued to be the main form of socialization for Black lesbians in the forties and fifties.

Although this decade afforded lesbians, particularly White lesbians the opportunity to be more visible in the public realm, the McCarthy era of the late forties and fifties was a time of increased conservatism and repression. In 1940, irreverent Black butch performer Gladys Bentley who had in decades previous always performed in nightclubs dressed in male attire, had to have the nightclub file for a special police permit allowing her to perform in pants rather than a skirt (Wilson, 2010). Bentley, whose presence had previously been not only tolerated but whose career in Harlem had flourished, descended into obscurity in the late 1940s and fifties (Wilson, 2010). According to Wilson (2010),

Harlem of the 1920s and 1930s may have tolerated a butch lesbian like Gladys Bentley, but in the McCarthy era of the late 1940s and early 1950s, she would have been perceived as something of a national menace. The ‘excess’ of Bentley’s persona, as marked by her flagrant violation of acceptable female behavior, appearance and desire, challenged the presupposed notion of femininity and necessarily had to be reclaimed by patriarchy (p. 188).

While bars offered White working class lesbians a sense of community and social cohesion the social conservatism of the era carried with it the threat of additional stigmatization and possibly violence. Kennedy and Davis (1993) contend that “In the 1940s the mere presence of homosexuals was interpreted by the State Liquor Authority as constituting disorderly conduct” (p. 41). Narrators in their study contend that bar owners routinely paid bribes to the police in exchange for protection against raids. Police raids in Buffalo, New York were reported to be infrequent. However, when such raids did occur, they brought with them the potential for violence, degradation and the further humiliation of having one’s name published in the morning paper.

Role of Butch in Lesbian Community

Butch identity and butch/femme relationships have and continue to contribute to lesbian community in at least three significant ways. Butch lesbians embody both pride in difference and defiance of sexual and gender conformity. From the emergence of the 1940s “severely masculine yet gentle butches who were willing to be identified as different...” (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. 153) to the “Black and white tough lesbians (who) continued this tradition in the 1950s pushing to be identified as lesbians, or ‘queers,’ twenty-four hours a day” (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. 153), butch lesbians participated in creating the conditions that later allowed for the contemporary lesbian and gay rights movement. Making no attempt to hide or tone down who they were, fifties tough butches and studs sought to eliminate the divide between their work and personal lives. Rather, “They forcefully defended their right to be different” (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. 175).

While resisting heteronormativity, butch lesbians were creating their own culture in the face of homophobia, heterosexism, and gender enforcement. Butches played a leadership role in asserting and affirming lesbian identity, culture and space. In the forties and fifties, lesbian bars were the primary pre-political institution of resistance against oppression (Feinberg, 1993; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). As Kennedy and Davis (1993) point out, the “homophile movement and gay liberation had their roots in the working-class culture of bars and house parties” (p. 150). Butches sought to ensure the survival of lesbian space by fighting against bar closures and by acquiring new opportunities for socializing and public activities (Chamberland, 1996; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). For example, butches in Buffalo were active in forming the first gay and lesbian organization in the city (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). As Kennedy and Davis (1993) astutely contend, butch and femme lesbians were “instrumental in the development of a distinct lesbian consciousness and identity, one that profoundly influenced gay liberation” (p. 190). Butches continue to mark out distinctly lesbian space and, in doing so positively affirm lesbian culture.

Finally butch and femme relationships contributed positively to lesbian communities by introducing into feminist discourse sex as pleasurable and powerful (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Lamos, 1994; Nestle, 1992b). While the profound contributions of radical feminists in challenging men’s violence against women should not be understated, discourses that privileged the connection between sex and sexism concealed the potential pleasures associated with sex (Nestle, 1992b). By making sexual desire explicit, butch/femme relationships claimed sex and pleasure for women.

Kennedy and Davis (1993) point out that butch/femme relationships changed the way lesbians talked about sex. They describe the shift that occurred in working class lesbian communities in the fifties with regard to sexuality and language specifically. Narrators in their study, described

working class lesbians as less ashamed to talk openly about sex and experiment with new sexual practices than previous generations. Kennedy and Davis (1993) conclude, “The rigidification of roles and an openness about sexuality interacted to create an erotic system predicated above all on the sexual satisfaction of women” (p. 214). This is a profoundly empowering and feminist feat in my view.

Butch continues to stand as a defiant affirmation of women’s sexual autonomy. As activist and writer Carmen Vazquez astutely asserted at the Butch Conference (Butch Voices LA, 2010) in LA last fall,

Butch and femme are an insistence of feminist sexual freedom. If feminism doesn’t mean that a woman can wear whatever she pleases and fuck another woman as hard as she can so that they both experience unbridled pleasure, then what is the point of it?

Role of Butch in Larger Culture

Homosexuality has long been defined in North America as deviant, degenerate, and pathological. These discourses have simultaneously constructed butch subjectivity and been resisted (Grahn, 1984; Kennedy and Davis, 1993; Lamos, 1994; MacGowan, 1992). Butch women have continued to exist in the face of repression, intolerance and pathological constructions. Their defiant resistance to gender conformity and their unabashed sexual desire for other women constructed butch lesbians as outside the realm of normal, as mentally unstable. In challenging what it means to be a “normal” woman, butch lesbians make it easier for all women to make choices in resisting stereotypical notions of femininity. Moreover, butch lesbians expand rather than narrow our notions of what it means to be attractive as a woman.

Butch lesbians have and continue to critically challenge dominant discourses that situate masculinity as the dominion of men. They confront heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, threatening the binary gender order by queering masculinity (Eves, 2004; Ngyuen, 2008; Soloman, 1993). The significance of which will be expanded on in the forthcoming section.

In the same way that butch/femme relationships made sexual pleasure explicit in lesbian communities, they were pioneers in women's struggle for sexual autonomy more generally. Kennedy and Davis (1993) articulate that lesbians of the forties and fifties "embodied the new ideas that women had sexual desires, that sexual pleasure was separate from reproduction, and that sexuality could exist outside of marriage" (p. 195). They further assert,

In some sense, butch and fem each embodied complementary aspects of what feminists today would consider necessary for women's sexual autonomy. The butch represented women's ability to initiate, act on, and realize sexual passion for another and to satisfy the other fully. The fem embodied woman's knowledge of and delight in her body and assertive concern for her own fulfillment (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. 229).

Butch and femme lesbians of the past were instrumental in constructing a contemporary discourse that makes women's sexual pleasure an important and legitimate entitlement.

Butch as a Challenge to Heteropatriarchy and Homonormativity

Heterosexism, homophobia, racism and women's oppression are intricately connected and mutually supported. They rely on each other to exist. In their demand for lesbian presence, butch/femme aesthetics disrupt hegemonic heteropatriarchy. Butch/femme identities challenge heteronormativity and offer the potential to subvert heterosexual discourses and male domination

(Eves, 2004; Ngyuen, 2008). Moreover, these embodied subject positions are constituted as tactics of resistance and queer affirmation (Eves, 2004; Nestle, 1992b).

Heteropatriarchy defines masculinity as the sole property of men. Female bodies are resolutely considered antithetical to masculinity. The butch body corrupts, contorts and colonizes masculinity (Soloman, 1993). As such, butch aesthetics critically challenge heteronormativity and patriarchal power relations. Ngyuen (2008) argues that the butch aesthetic “threatens male power by severing the naturalized connection between masculinity and male bodies, by causing masculinity to appear ‘queer,’ and by usurping men’s roles” (p. 665). She illustrates how the presence of butch bodies in women’s washrooms and men’s clothing stores defies gender regulation and denaturalizes hegemonic masculinity. Moreover Ngyuen (2008) argues, “As a lesbian, she brings the additional threat of not only wearing men’s clothes but also usurping other roles that reaffirm men of their masculinity, such as changing a flat tire or being a stud in the bedroom” (p. 676).

Despite assertions that butch/femme gender and sexual identities simply replicate the stereotypical gender binary, such identities provide a model for challenging essentialist notions of identity (Case, 1993). Butch and femme identities reveal both the fluidity and falsity of gender. As Jean Bobby Noble (2004) argues, “Butch-femme is no longer an imitation of gender but a parody of heterosexuality that deconstructs the operations of the sex/gender system and, subsequently all gender identities, as performative effects” (p. xii). The ambiguity and transgressive nature of butch/femme identities have the potential to model multiple ways of being, while avoiding the traps of essentialism (Case, 1993). Butch aesthetics defiantly flout gender rules and challenge the alleged connection between sex and gender – what it means to be

a woman and conversely what it means to be a man. As Solomon (1993) concludes, to be “butch isn’t simply to flunk gender training; it is to scoff at the whole curriculum” (p. 38).

Butch identity remains critical to both lesbian and feminist communities today because butches continue to mark themselves (and their partners) as different from White heteropatriarchy. In doing so, they confront heterosexism by critically challenging all of the assumptions about normative sexuality and gender. Writing about why she loves butches, Queen (1994) articulates,

What I love about butch women is their profound inability or refusal to be ‘normal.’ In the war between the sexes we can see them as warriors or resisters, but in any case, they stand as living proof that gender is more fluid, its imperatives more socially contrived and less innately rigid...What I love about butch women is the way they stand as sentries, maybe even guides, to expanded possibility (p. 21).

In addition to the challenges butch provides to heteronormativity, butch critically challenges homonormativity – what it means to be a lesbian. Butches expand the options available to us both as women and as lesbians. At a time when dominant discourses are appropriating lesbians as Hollywood supermodels and increasing numbers of lesbians are just looking to fit into the mainstream, this seems to me more important than ever. As Phelan (1998) astutely argues, “A movement that demands assimilation as the price of ‘equality’ fails to fully grasp the oppression of lesbians, an oppression that is rooted in gender norms as much as in proscriptions on sexuality” (p. 196).

Conclusion

The emergence of butch identity has been both constructed and resisted within the context of various social and political conditions. White, western beliefs about gender roles and male superiority in the late eighteenth century made it inconceivable that a woman could sexually desire another woman. Such desire could only be explained as sexual inversion or being in the “wrong body.” Lesbianism was thus seen as an inappropriate expression of gender, a deviant desire to be a man. Moreover, as the most visible expression of lesbianism, butch was understood as characterizing all lesbians.

Later, the feminine lesbian was acknowledged although she was thought not really a lesbian but rather, a gullible woman of limited intellect, who was easily duped. Through the emergence of capitalism and the erosion of the nuclear family, the “predatory” butch was cast as a threat to the sanctity of the family and the respectability of White, middle-class women. World War II and second wave feminism created a social climate which allowed some women to think beyond the confines of wife and motherhood. Moreover, the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement contributed to a contentious environment whereby anyone who did not easily fit into White, heteropatriarchy was suspect and needed to be controlled.

Threatened by the overt gender and sexual insubordination of butch, methods to control her included vilifying her by constructing her as Other or pathologically disturbed. Associated with working class and racialized bodies, butches were constructed as boorish, vulgar and lacking in sophistication. Moreover, her desire for masculine appearance and mannerisms are considered antithetical to ideals of feminine beauty. Thus, the butch has been constructed both as ugly and as a barrier to achieving lesbian respectability.

During the McCarthy years overtly, coercive measures were employed to control and regulate butch. These came in the form of police brutality and violence, the surveilling and harassment of “sexual perverts,” the persecution of queers in the military, and the firing of queer people from civil service jobs, the latter two often resulting in being unemployable.

In resistance to dominant discourses which construct her as Other and coercive forms of social control, butch has persevered as a visible representation of female masculinity. Constructed by both dominant and subjugated discourses, butch contorts hegemonic masculinity, manipulating it to form her own lesbian masculinity. To defend herself against male violence and assert her power within the context of heteropatriarchy, female masculinity in the fifties and sixties took the form of being tough, sexually aggressive and unwilling to be sexually vulnerable. Butches modeled themselves after male rock musicians of the time and adhered to relatively rigid gender roles. This masculine articulation often reinforced the notion among both lesbian feminists and dominant culture that butches were simply imitating the “real” men they wanted to be. The discourse that butches are men trapped in women’s bodies and/or secretly desire to *be* men has over the decades waxed and waned. It currently seems to characterize the trend towards FTM transitioning.

In the next chapter, I explore many of these same discourses as they arise in the current context of butch existence. In particular, I examine how the discourses as (re)produced by *The L Word* and the *DSM-IV-TR* GID that construct butch as pathologically Other, as dangerous, as deficient, as unfathomable, as inhabiting the “wrong body,” and as bizarre are employed as technologies of normalization.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis

In this chapter I lay out how the butch as conceived by *The L Word* consistently (re)produces the *DSM-IV-TR* GID diagnosis by showing how these texts work together to discipline lesbian subjectivity. My intention is to expose the discourses in action, showing how they do their work and by revealing the instruction that each provides as a disciplinary technique. Moreover, as Weedon (1997, italics in original) points out, “[I]t is only by looking at a discourse *in operation*, in a specific historical context, that it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment” (p. 108). Following the character Moira/Max, I have divided the sections by the main discourses employed by *The L Word* and have attempted to reveal the work that each accomplishes. *The L Word* and GID seem to me to be in conversation with one another. There exists a complex interplay between GID and *The L Word* whereby through the performances of Moira/Max and the other characters, each discursive field reconstitutes the instruction of the other. To demonstrate the way in which GID appears to speak directly to *The L Word*, I have structured my analysis as a conversation by weaving throughout excerpts from GID that instruct on the particular discourse to be performed. The focus of my analysis is to uncover the ways in which the discourses employed by *The L Word* and GID mutually reinforce and work with each other to authorize, sanction, and discipline our subjectivity in accordance with a binary conception of gender.

To elucidate, I draw on key Foucauldian concepts discussed in my Methodology such as coherence (what previous knowledge is needed for the discourse to make sense or, as is often the case, be taken for granted), bio-power (by way of regulatory measures and sanctioning, the way in which bodies are made to want to conform), the psychiatrization of perversity (a method of bio-power that achieves bodily compliance by making certain sexual behaviors and identities

pathological), the pedagogization of children's sexuality (another method of bio-power which relies on the indoctrination of children into their "appropriate" sexuality by parents, teachers and other figures of authority), and dividing practices (the way in which human beings seek to render themselves "normal" by comparing themselves to and disavowing Others). Viewing and reviewing *The L Word* through this methodological lens, I attend to how the portrayal of the character Moira/Max repetitively and consistently performs the discourses of GID. Regardless of intentions, these discourses effectively disappear butch.

Butch as Other/Disordered

The L Word and the *DSM* complement and reinforce the disappearance of butch. Invoking the psychiatrization of perversity, the *DSM* diagnoses butch as mentally disordered. *The L Word* similarly condemns butch by marking her as Other. Productive of knowledge and power, both *The L Word* and the *DSM* discipline our subjectivity by providing instruction on how to avoid a deviant designation. The *DSM IV-TR* demarcates four diagnostic criteria for GID (APA, 2000). Criteria A makes, "A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex)" indicative of disorder (APA, 2000, p. 581). In children, four of the following five markers must be met for a GID diagnosis. These include:

- (1) repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex
- (2) in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing
- (3) strong and persistent preference for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex
- (4) intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex

(5) strong preference for playmates of the other sex

In adolescents and adults, the criteria is less rigid emphasizing one's "desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex" (APA, 2000, p. 581). It is my contention that, the butch as conceived by *The L Word*, consistently (re)produces the GID diagnosis.

"insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing" (APA, 2000, p.581).

In the first episode of season three, we are introduced to the character Moira Sweeney. Jenny, one of the main characters has left Los Angeles and returned to her home town Skokie to recover from what is characterized as a nervous breakdown. Moira and Jenny meet in a bar where they make plans to go to LA together. The camera pans the bar, setting the stage for Moira's entrance. Despite being only a two-second scene, it is all that is needed to convey a very different feeling than the posh and polished, martini sipping establishments that the "ladies" frequent in LA. In LA, Kit one of the main characters owns The Planet, a big, bright restaurant/night club with floor to ceiling windows that open onto a patio, lots of plants, and fancy lighting and furnishings. By day, the high-fashion and business-attired LA lesbians enjoy fresh-squeezed juice and espresso. At night, cocktails with umbrella garnishes are enjoyed by heavily made-up, stilettoed and cocktail dress clad patrons. The tables have fresh flowers on them and the outdoor patio tables are topped with white canvas umbrellas. In stark contrast, we meet Moira in a dimly lit bar with pool tables, a juke box, and neon beer signs. The bar is evocative of the straight, working-class bars I frequented in my youth. It is both comfortable in its familiarity and class expectations and uncomfortable in its insistence of heteronormativity and sexist conventions.

The patrons are casually dressed, many in jeans and plaid, drinking pitchers of beer. Moira swaggers into the scene, approaching Jenny with a bottle of beer in hand. Her construction as working class and the first undisputedly butch central character is immediately recognizable. In contrast to Jenny's feminine appearance, Moira is wearing a plaid shirt with the arms cut off to reveal a small tattoo on her bicep, a down vest, jeans, and scruffy hair. Moira walks over to Jenny's table, puts her beer down and asks "How you doin'?" Moira's butchness is made visible in part, relative to Jenny's femininity. Reflecting normative constructions of femaleness, Jenny is White and has long stylish hair. She wears make-up, and a top with spaghetti straps that expose her bra straps. Unlike Moira, she is drinking wine. Jenny is effusive, at one point clapping her hands excitedly when Moira tells her that she's decided to go to LA with her. Drawing on White, Western discourses of masculinity, Moira on the other hand plays it cool.

Butch is constituted not merely by discourses of masculinity, but more specifically by masculine working class discourses. The "lower" class "sexual invert" epitomized the butch lesbian in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Caprio, 1954; Faderman, 1991; Halberstam, 1998; Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Today, working class people are stereotypically associated with frequenting a particular kind of bar such as the one described above, complete with pool tables, beer drinking, neon signs, simple furnishings, and dance floor disco balls. Common sense discourses correlate working class men with tattoos, plaid cotton shirts (especially lumber jackets), heavy drinking, jeans, brutishness, and physical ability. Cast on a female body, this masculine working class image has characterized butch imagery in North America. It is the image that (at least up till recently) most North Americans have been instructed to conjure when they think about lesbians. The image of butch conjures commonly held assumptions about lesbian sexuality as one of lack. It is often assumed for example, that lesbians are thus because

they are too homely and boorish to earn the attraction of a man. Associated with vulgarity and ugliness, butch is the image that we as women are taught to vigorously avoid. As Halberstam (2002) articulates,

Lesbianism has long been associated with female masculinity and female masculinity in turn has been figured as undesirable by linking it in essential and unquestionable ways to female ugliness. The dilemma of the masculine and therefore ugly woman functions as the specter that haunts feminine identification in order to ensure that few women cathect onto female masculinity through either identification or desire (p. 359).

Provoking both fear and disdain, the discourse of the ugly butch has been successful in delimiting the subject positions available to us. Those who take up a butch subjectivity do so in resistance to dominant discourses and normative definitions of woman. While debates circulate as to whether butch identity is constructed or “natural,” some butches seeing it as inherent to their very being and others as more performative than innate, butch subjectivities are constructed in opposition to normative gender prescriptions. Thus, even as butch feels “natural,” it is a refusal to comply with “normal.” Whether consciously chosen or not, butch is an act of resistance to all of the messages that pronounce her as “wrong.” Articulating a poststructural analysis of the construction of the subject, Davies et al. (2006) explain,

In taking itself up as rational and as willful, the individual understands itself to be choosing what it will be, when it is actually being given little choice about those categorizations – it can conform to the categories inside of which it has been placed, within its own specific and cultural and historic location, or it can resist and so encounter all the social, discursive, legal and disciplinary forces that will bring it into line (p. 91).

To recognize Moira as butch requires that she first be recognized as different, as Other than the norm. To realize this, the scene relies on my having successfully integrated a narrow conception of normative femaleness. My framework for how women and men look and behave is constituted by and productive of dominant discourses such as pop culture and the authority of science and medicine. The GID diagnosis provides authoritative backing and constructs common sense understandings of gender. It does so by not explicitly prescribing normative gender behaviour but by providing instructions for how not to behave. Diagnostic statements such as, “show(s) little interest in dolls or any other form of feminine dress up or role-play activity”, and prefers “rough-and-tumble play, and traditional boyhood games” (APA, 2000, p. 577) make normal and designate appropriate gendered behaviour, while simultaneously constructing pathology.

Popular culture both produces and complements the GID discourse, making normal common sense understandings about women and men. Foucault’s analysis of a pedagogization of children’s sexuality is useful here. From early childhood we are instructed and socialized by parents, teachers and other authority figures that women wear make up, dress femininely, look “pretty,” show good manners, display emotion and behave passively; in other words be “lady like.” Conversely, discourses of masculinity construct men as beer swilling (preferably from the bottle), sexually confident, aggressive, and emotionally reserved. Significantly, “femininity and masculinity signify as normative within and through white middle-class heterosexual bodies” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 29). Such gendered discourses are reinforced by peers and by popular culture all of whom consistently decree masculinity as the sole domain of men. To make Moira coherent as Other, I am instructed to both recognize and identify with the rules which dictate

appropriate gendered behaviour. While constituted by these discourses, I am also resistant to them.

At once compliant with dominant discourse, my subjectivity is also constructed by subjugated discourses which make butch valuable and desirable. As a lesbian femme, Moira's butch subjectivity is immediately identifiable and coherent to me based on stereotypes, my experience of lesbian and more specifically butch/femme culture, and significantly because I am eagerly looking for representations of butch. Until recently, the media would have us believe that lesbians exist only mythically or in the "sleazy underworld;" certainly not in mainstream society. While there is greater representation of lesbians currently, this representation is nominal amid the flood of heterosexist images and, as we will see, is strictly limited to a particular kind of lesbian that serves to reinforce hegemonic heterosexuality. Within this context, lesbians find ourselves searching for hints of ourselves, our culture and our lives; reading lesbian subtexts into non-lesbian or at best, inaccurate lesbian pop culture representations.

“strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make believe play or persistent fantasies about being the other sex” (APA, p. 581).

Jenny and Moira slow dance and make plans to leave town together. Drawing again on discourses that construct women as the frailer sex, the butch character is taller than her feminine partner and is shown taking the lead. With her arms around Moira's neck Jenny asks, "Are you thinking about having sex with me right now?" Moira responds, "It's crossed my mind." Kissing long and passionately, Moira moves her hands from Jenny's waist up under her shirt. In addition to discourses of masculinity, indoctrination in heterosexist culture successfully provides coherence. Despite my queer sensibility and feminist politics, this scene and the one that follows appear both "natural" and appealing to me. While critical of romantic, heterosexist

tropes, I cannot at the same time escape being constructed by them. These discourses intentionally play on my own feelings about desire and desirability. Despite that Jenny is shown introducing the possibility of sex, repeated discursive training has taught me to understand a masculine embodiment as the leader in sexual endeavors. Integral to the pedagogization of children's sexuality is the teaching that good girls are to behave submissively and that masculinity is synonymous with sexual aggression. These discourses are recited ad nauseam within popular culture including movies, television, music videos, and song lyrics; all vigorously constructing desirable women as, on the one hand, sexually passive and available and on the other as untrustworthy and promiscuous. "Real" men conversely are heterosexually constituted as sexually dominant, assertive and in charge (at least in the bedroom). Within butch/femme culture, dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity are enforced through demeaning jokes such as "Butch in the streets and femme in the sheets."

Jenny and Moira return to Jenny's parent's home to pick up Jenny's things. While there, the two have sex until they are interrupted by Jenny's parents. Facing the camera (and her parents), Jenny is found straddling Moira's lap wearing only a bra and a short skirt. Again, we are prompted to discourses that play on heterosexual desires and straight porn fantasies. The sexual position instructs us to see Jenny as the receptive, submissive partner. Despite being on top, it is clear that Jenny is being penetrated, a sexual act long associated with femininity. Positioned as she is, Moira is able to fuck Jenny and objectify her at the same time. Moreover, while Moira also has her top off, her back is to the camera. Consistent with her masculine subjectivity she is not wearing a bra. Typical to mainstream media, it is the feminine body; in this case Jenny's half naked body that is exposed to the viewer. Jenny is constructed as both vulnerable and sexual. In contrast, we are directed to begin developing an image of Moira as in control and untouchable.

Walking in on the two, Jenny's outraged stepfather demands "How dare you bring a man into my home!" Moira's masculine appearance, the sexual dynamic between her and Jenny, combined with the presumption that Moira is a man underlines Moira's butch gender presentation and equates this subjectivity with deviance. We are directed that if Moira is going to look like a man, she should *be* a man. The discourse plays on common sense beliefs that masculinity is the equivalent of maleness. While Moira's stepfather is incensed that Jenny "bring a man into (his) home", the revelation that Moira is not a man is even more horrific. Not only is the stepfather confronted with his daughter's lesbianism, but with someone who threatens to destabilize his claim to masculinity.

"intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex" (APA, p. 581).

On route to Los Angeles and further underlining Moira's masculinity, Jenny is seen giving Moira "head" while Moira drives her black pick up truck. Receiving head and driving a pick up truck are both familiar cultural associations with men. Moreover, as a marker of masculinity, owning a truck is culturally understood among lesbians as a butch signifier. Regularly trespassing male terrain, we are instructed to see Moira usurping male behaviours. We are again cued to recognize Moira's butchness as a violation of common sense rules which dictate gender normativity. Driving while getting head from her girlfriend Moira can also be seen as symptomatic of the next GID criteria the "desire to live or be treated as the other sex" (APA, 2000, p. 581)

"desire to live or be treated as the other sex" (APA, p. 581).

Explicitly regarding a desire to be treated as a man, as a marker of cross-gender identification, GID equates a desire to be *treated* as the other sex with a desire to *be* the other sex. With Jenny's

head still in her lap, Moira is shown cursing that they have run out of gas. Alarmed, Jenny begins to pull away. Playing on cultural knowledge that most North Americans recognize as male, Moira begs, “Don’t stop Jenny. Keep going. Don’t *blue ball me*.” While it could again be argued that Jenny is in fact taking up an active or even dominant role, Jenny’s coherence as the receptive partner is achieved through discourses of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality that equate femininity with subservience. We are once more directed to understand Moira as playing a sexually aggressive role. In appropriating a territory reserved exclusively for men, that being a sexual territory, we are instructed to ascertain that consistent with GID, Moira is wanting to “be treated as the *other sex*” (emphasis added). Thus, we are instructed to view Moira as latently longing to *be* a man. This assumption is deeply rooted in dominant discourses, medical discourse and even some feminist scholarship, perpetuating the assertion that butches really want to be men (Caprio, 1954; Faderman, 1991; Ross, 1995).

“rejection of urinating in a sitting position” (APA, p.581).

Out of gas and stranded, Moira and Jenny are later seen peeing by the side of the road. Standing while peeing, Moira explains matter-of-factly to Jenny “I always have, even when I was little. When my dad caught me he popped me one.” This scene is suggestive of at least two dominant discourses. First, common sense understanding of gender prescribe that women don’t get head (they only give it), they don’t need sex the way that men do, and most importantly, they always sit to pee. Standing to urinate marks Moira as not only different from conventional norms but as distinctly pathological. That GID specifically authorizes standing to urinate as a marker of disorder in girls is perhaps the most overt signifier of Moira’s aberrancy.

Moira’s comment that her dad disciplined her for gender subversion, points to the second discourse – the dangers inherent to butch and gender deviant people. It also evokes Foucault’s

(1980) analysis of the “pedagogization of children” – or the need for parents (and others) to appropriately prepare their children for sexual adulthood. Asserting that children’s sexual activity was simultaneously seen as both dangerous and in need of protection, Foucault (1980) reasoned that, “Parents, families, educators, doctors, and eventually psychologists would have to take charge...of this precious and perilous, dangerous and endangered sexual potential” (p. 104). It is suggested that, fearing his daughter’s behaviour was indicative of homosexual tendencies, Moira’s father hastily corrected her. We are instructed that butches (and anyone else who does not unmistakably pass as either male or female), are both dangerous and at frequent risk of danger, a recurrent theme which I’ll now turn to.

Warning: Butches In/En Danger(ed)

Heading out to LA in Moira’s pick up truck, Jenny discovers a taser in Moira’s glove compartment. In response to Jenny’s alarm and foreshadowing scenes to come, Moira explains, “I get a lot of shit from people and I need to take care of myself.” What is implicit here is that life is fraught with danger for Moira. The taser is indicative that Moira fears physical violence. I am able to make sense of Moira’s fear and need for protection based on my indoctrination of the rules dictating gender and sexuality, Moira’s clear violation of these rules and firsthand experience of the consequences for defiance. Clearly illustrated in Feinberg’s (1993) novel *Stone Butch Blues*, the law cannot be trusted to protect gender deviants. Aware of the dangers associated with my own refusal to comply with gender normativity and through my relationships with butch women, I cannot help but feel afraid. I readily comprehend and take for granted Moira’s need for protection. We are instructed that as a lesbian and as butch, Moira pays the price of breaking the rules. Significantly however, the rules themselves are taken for granted.

This discourse is highly effective in disciplining my subjectivity. Fearing the consequences of insubordination, bio-power is enacted on me as my body is made to want to conform.

“[Girls’ with GID] prefer boys’ clothing and short hair, are often misidentified by strangers as boys and may ask to be called a boy’s name” (APA, p. 577).

Jenny and Moira flag down a passing RV for assistance. Jenny and Moira watch as an older White man and a woman descend from the camper. The man is heavy set and wears a plaid shirt, canvas jacket and a baseball cap. The woman follows him, also a few pounds heavier wearing a full skirt and a long cardigan sweater. Relying on dominant discourses, I ascertain from their appearance that they are a couple and that they are country folk. Based on their age, race, my perception of them as working class, and the stereotypes attached to these subject positions, I also understand that they are likely quite conservative. I immediately feel my body tense. The man greets Jenny and Moira.

“Hey there fella.”

“Oh, she’s not a...” (Jenny’s voice trails off as Moira nudges her, giving her a look that says “say no more”).

“Looks like you need some help.”

“Yeah, we ran outta gas.”

“Not a problem. I’ll siphon some outta the RV.” (Holding out his hand) “My name’s Hal by the way.”

“Hi”

“Hi, I’m Jenny. Nice to meet you.”

“This is wife Martha”

“Hello Martha.”

Speaking for the first time Martha offers, “We got some fried chicken in the camper if you and your husband are hungry.”

Jenny responds enthusiastically, “Yes, I would love to have some fried chicken. Thank you.”

Looking a little skeptically at Moira, Hal asks, “What do you say your name was son?”

“Uh, it’s Max.”

Despite no obvious signs of danger, the scene is permeated with suspense. Aware of the dangers faced by gay, lesbian, and especially ambiguously gendered people in small town America, I am filled with apprehension. At best, I am afraid that Moira and Jenny will be verbally insulted and left stranded, at the mercy of the next passerby. My worst fear however is that, like Brandon Teena, they will be raped and lynched for their gender and sexual crimes. Neither happens, but the threat of violence continues to infuse the scene as my conservative supposition rings true. The man dominates the conversation and stereotypically attends to mechanical matters. His wife clearly plays a secondary role, one that is tied to traditional responsibilities such as cooking and being a good hostess. This is coherent to me based on cultural knowledge of gender roles in heterosexual relationships. These conventions are central to patriarchy and to heterosexuality as a system.

As a tool of patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality represents the supposed naturalness of opposite gendered relationships and roles which assume and uphold the superiority of men. Moira and Jenny’s relationship and Moira in particular, pose a threat to these systems as they reveal the hollowness on which they are based. As Butler (1996, *italics in original*) similarly argues, “the parodic or imitative effect of gay identities works neither to copy nor emulate

heterosexuality, but to expose heterosexuality as an incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalized imitation” (p. 186). The panic that Butler refers to results from the threat that compulsory heterosexuality and prescribed gender roles may be exposed as mere social constructions exploited to maintain hegemony. My apprehension in watching Jenny and Moira interact with this couple can be attributed to the violence/disciplining that often ensues as a result of this panic. Posing a threat to heterosexuality’s essentialist claim, Moira and Jenny, and more importantly all real life gender and sexual deviants are ourselves potentially threatened.

I feel anxious watching Moira and Jenny interact with this couple. Moira is not like the “ladies” of *The L Word* who move through the world with relative safety and ease. Moira’s hesitation and reserve, particularly in contrast to Jenny’s demeanor, suggests she is apprehensive. Only at the end does Moira reluctantly introduce herself, and then indicative of her fear of violence, does not use her feminine sounding name, but a typically male name. Moira is far less friendly than Jenny in this interaction. Unlike Jenny, she doesn’t say “nice to meet you” or respond to the invitation to share food. Picking up on Moira’s apprehensive, self-protective and reserved manner, I too feel uneasy. My body again prompts me to the critical importance of gender conformity. Abating the sense of danger and suspense, the older couple assume that Moira and Jenny are a straight married couple. Clearly attuned to gender rules, Moira plays along introducing herself as Max. The man looks somewhat suspiciously at Moira but in the end follows his wife’s lead in sharing fried chicken with the pair. I am left feeling relieved but warned of the perils inherent to butch. I am reminded that next time may not go as well.

Later in the journey Moira and Jenny are faced with real danger. Moira is seen coming out of a bathroom stall. Standing before the mirror, an angry young woman yells at her,

“What the hell you doing in here boy? Can’t you read this is the ladies room?
Get the fuck out.”

Moira counters, “I’m a girl” and exits the washroom.”

The young woman follows her out and walks purposefully towards her male friends. Sensing the impending danger Moira instructs Jenny to drive away immediately.

“You see that freak there; *it* was just in the girl’s bathroom.”

“Must be a faggot.” (Yelling at Moira.) “Faggot!”

The three youth approach Moira and continue to taunt her with homophobic slurs. The violence escalates when one of the men drags Moira out of the car. Yelling at Jenny he sneers, “Does she fuck you like a man? Get back in the fuckin’ truck bitch and I’ll show you how a real man fucks.” These men are both a threat to Moira and at the same are clearly threatened by her. Moira’s masculinity impinges on their ownership of sexual prowess and thus entitlement to women’s sexuality. At the same time however, the threat suggested by their words seems directed at Jenny. While Moira’s very appearance blatantly transgresses gender normativity, Jenny also rebukes traditional femininity in her desire for women, and even more so her desire for a butch woman. As such she is a threat to the stability and maintenance of heteropatriarchy. The threat leveled against Jenny is evocative of corrective rape in South Africa. Designed to cure lesbianism through forced heterosexual sex, corrective rape has the dual effect of punishing specific sexual and gender deviants while also serving as a menacing reminder of compulsory heterosexuality; thereby disciplining the subjectivity of all. While not labeled as such, corrective rape is also part of North American discourse. In *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) for example, Jess, the main character is gang raped for the first time early on in the novel by a group of White boys. Indicative of the intersections of oppression and the hateful impetus to punish and annihilate

difference, one of Jess' rapists tellingly sneers: "You dirty Kike bitch, you fucking bulldagger" (Feinberg, 1993, p. 40)." Receiving the message that being Jewish, female bodied, and a dyke are crimes that require correction Jess concludes, "All my crimes were listed. I was guilty as charged" (Feinberg, 1993, p. 40).

As the above examples demonstrate, lesbians and butches in particular are certainly vulnerable to danger and homophobic attacks. However, *The L Word's* reiteration that lesbians are sexually inadequate at satisfying each other and that butches are deviant, discursively reproduces such notions (regardless of whether or not one agrees). In its' choice of scenes and characters, *The L Word* affirms rather than challenges a heteronormative standpoint. Within this context, the scene described above calls into question Moira's value and worth as both a lover and a human being. Moira and Jenny's encounter with violence (re)produces the pervasive discourse that butches are merely bad imitations of the "real" men women really want (aka only men are capable of satisfying women). Moira is portrayed as deficient both as a woman and as a man.

As in previous scenes, it also serves to underline the common sense notion that one is either unambiguously identifiable as male or female. Reinforced by the GID diagnosis, it instructs that there are right and wrong ways for men and women to behave. Moreover, those who do not conform are abnormal and not worthy of respect. The violence that ensues inculcates us to the consequences of gender deviance instructing us that it is dangerous to be butch. Socializing, indoctrinating and disciplining my complicity to gender regulations, bio-power is enacted in the moment making certain subject positions desirable and others fear-provoking. By prompting me to the penalties for insubordination, *The L Word* and the *DSM* coax my desire to perform in accordance with the gender binary.

Feminine Seduction

What is intended to further elicit my complicity, Jenny reinforces her superior feminine subject position by denying Moira's difference. Moira's butchness is presented as coincidental to Jenny's attraction to her. Oblivious to Moira's gender non-conformity, she is seemingly surprised by the butch phobia Moira experiences. Examples of this include: Jenny's expression of shock and denial about Moira's need for a taser, her impulse to correct the man with the RV about Moira's gender, and her apparent obliviousness to the urgency in Moira's voice indicating a need to immediately leave the parking lot where they were assaulted. These scenes instruct us that Jenny's experience and ignorance is normal and expected, thus further cementing Moira's construction as deviant. In the same way that liberal White people, oblivious to the racism around them, assert colour-blindness, Jenny is both representative of common sense rules regarding gender and willfully ignorant that there are, in fact, rules. As Razack and Fellows (1998) observe, "To be unmarked or unnamed is also simply to embody the norm and not to have actively produced and sustained it" (p. 7). As someone whose appearance conforms to dominant gender norms, Jenny takes her relatively normative subject position for granted. In doing so, she reasserts the discourse that femininity is natural and innate. Jenny's privilege relative to Moira, allays any need to be aware of the consequences for non-conformity. Wanting to construct ourselves as rational, we are persuaded to identify with Jenny's normative subject position. In doing so we must distance ourselves from identifying in any way with Moira or the stereotypical butch.

Playing on the stone butch stereotype, the following scene further illustrates Jenny's reticence with Moira's butch presentation. Kissing in their motel room, Jenny tries to put her hand inside Moira's jeans whispering, "Tell me you want me to fuck you. You never let me fuck you."

Moira pulls away saying, “No. I can’t. I’m sorry.” Reminiscent of *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), these scenes both reflect and reproduce normative understandings of what it means to be female bodied. Females, we are instructed want to get “fucked.” Those who do not are “immutably linked to dysfunction, melancholy, and misfortune” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 112). In *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), Butch Jan, one of the older butches shamefully confides to Jess that her beloved has left her because she is stone. Eyes full of tears, Jan laments desperately,

I’d do anything to get her back. I’d get down on my godamn knees in front of the whole bar. I’d do anything. I just can’t change the way I am. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I just can’t you know (Feinberg, 1993, p. 94).

Similar to Jan’s conclusion that her femaleness is defective, Moira’s “I can’t” and her subsequent apology, suggest that there is something defective about her. Productive of knowledge and power relations, this scene again confirms Jenny’s experience as normal, thereby reproducing dominant constructions of femaleness and Othering Moira’s experience as a butch woman.

Homonormative (Lipstick) Lesbians

When Jenny and Moira arrive at Jenny’s home in LA they are greeted by Jenny’s housemates Shane and Carmen. Carmen appears to experience an immediate aversion to Moira. Apparently constrained by stereotypes about what women look like, Carmen expresses disbelief that Jenny’s “new girlfriend” is a girl. She mocks Moira’s off handed offer to “let us butches [meaning Shane and herself] look after the luggage.” Moira’s clear identification as butch is significant because up till now *The L Word* has not uttered The B Word. The decision to use it here seems to underscore *The L Word’s* apparent intention to have Moira unmistakably read as butch. On the off chance that viewers had not picked up on *The L Word’s* concerted efforts to reveal Moira’s

butchness, they lay it out. They also not insignificantly cue viewers to Shane's butchness but make a point, as we shall later see, of demarcating Shane from Moira.

Apparently turned off both by Moira's uninhibited female masculinity and her unrefined demeanor, Carmen is reluctant to have Moira join the gang for Jenny's welcome home dinner. Indeed, Carmen's disdain for Moira appears to be directly related to Moira's working class and butch presentation. Relying on historical deprecatory discourses that link female masculinity and lower class background, we are instructed to see Moira as a caricature, noting in particular how not to behave. This scene induces our complicity to both demean and dissociate ourselves from Moira.

Carmen's disavowal of butch however, strongly contradicts indications of a butch/femme dynamic in her own romantic relationship with Shane. Prior to Jenny's return home, Carmen is shown performing a private, sultry strip tease for Shane. Relying again on heteronormative discourses of sex and romance, Shane leans back on the desk wearing men's underwear, and a snug fitting, men's white undershirt. Dragging on her cigarette, she watches lustfully as Carmen seductively lifts her dress to reveal a sexy black bra, with matching panties and garter. In contradiction to Carmen's abjuration of butch, Shane and Carmen are shown explicitly eroticizing male/female gender roles and playing with constructions of femininity and masculinity. In other words, they are depicted as classic butch/femme.

Yet another example occurs when Shane is introduced to Carmen's traditional Latino family. Oblivious to the true nature of her daughter's relationship with Shane, and to Shane's gender presentation, Carmen's well meaning but naïve mother insists that Shane wear her old dress to a family event. Trying to be good sport, Shane reluctantly goes along. Evoking the pathology discourse of GID which makes negative reactions to feminine attire "disordered," Shane appears

horrified and painfully uncomfortable to be wearing a dress. Seeming to acknowledge Shane's butchness, Carmen jokes that Shane looks like "a tranny on a wedding cake." To "get" the joke, and thus be complicit with the discourse that femininely dressed masculine beings are comical, we are required to recognize Shane's masculinity and as well to know that masculinity and dresses don't cohere. To realize this we must be attuned to markers that signify Shane's masculinity (such as her depiction as a "player"). At the same time however, we are directed to deny her butch identity. Not only does Shane not identify as butch, she performs in ways that are stereotypically viewed as quite feminine such as wearing make-up and in promotional materials is pictured in a short, black cocktail dress. *The L Word* grants a degree of acceptability about appropriating a tom boy aesthetic while simultaneously instructing that claiming a butch identity crosses the line of respectability. Tomboys, notes Halberstam (1998), are tolerated and even encouraged so long as "it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of a girl identity. Tomboyism is punished, however, when it appears to be the sign of an extreme male identification (taking a boy's name or refusing girl clothing of any type) and when it threatens to extend beyond childhood and into adolescence" (p. 6). *The L Word* may be pushing the limits of gender normativity with Shane but her feminine attributes assure her place on the acceptable side of the gender binary.

Significantly, Carmen is working class and is also a woman of colour. Having gained acceptance into the White circle, it does *not* seem a coincidence that Carmen is both the most threatened by Moira and the most in denial of her desire for butch lesbians. Unlike the other "ladies," Carmen's subjectivity is intersected by racism, classism, and homophobia. Likely having experienced Otherness, she is perhaps more invested in detaching herself from the stereotypical lesbian. As Fellows and Razack (1998) explain, in resistance to systems of

domination, women try to secure a “toehold on respectability” by assimilating with the norm and separating themselves from those deemed less respectable than themselves. While Carmen has achieved a level of respectability, her relative privilege is probably dependent on disassociation from more degenerate subjectivities. Assimilated as she is with other lipstick lesbians, Carmen is able to overlook her own transgressions. Moreover, her Otherness is less apt to be revealed and her own internalized homophobia is less likely triggered. It is after all, the maligned butch who has most epitomized the lesbian image.

Jenny’s welcome home dinner takes place at a very upscale restaurant. Prior to their arrival, and hinting at the restaurant’s high-end status, Alice relates to Carmen, Shane and viewers that the restaurant and its French chef were showcased in *LA Magazine*. Dressed in fancy, high fashion attire, the “ladies” arrive early and enjoy a drink in the bar. True to Alice’s intimation, the restaurant is dimly lit with lots of candles, orchids on the bar tables, and white linen table cloths and napkins. Jenny and Moira enter the scene. Dressed in a sleeveless black sweetheart dress, heels, hair coiffed in an updo, and wearing lots of eye liner and mascara, Jenny leads the way to greet her friends. Underscoring the historical ties between butch and social class which I discussed earlier, Moira follows behind (stereo)typically dressed again in a plaid shirt with the arms cut off, a t-shirt, jeans, and scruffy hair. What follows is a socially awkward interaction between Moira and the rest of the group. At first, Jenny seems to forget to introduce Moira. There is an awkward silence as some of the “ladies” look her up and down. Moira swallows and looks around the room. The “ladies” all smile and try to act friendly but it feels forced. There is a definite tension as it seems the “ladies” are having to work hard at being nice. The scene

immediately makes obvious the group's discomfort with Moira, effectively underscoring her Otherness.

The maître d` seats the group at their table. Moira scans the menu which includes a "Palate Cleanser – Liquid Nitrogen" for twelve dollars and main courses in the fifty dollar range. She looks uncomfortable and tells the waiter she will have a salad and a side of fries. The waiter announces to the table, "Tonight's green salad is a rocket frisée and shaved Jerusalem artichokes with a pine cone infused jus." Moira swallows again and with Alice looking on intently, asks, "How much is that?" Unlike Moira, the rest of the group seem to think nothing of fifty dollar dinner entrees as they nonchalantly proceed to order dishes like lobster, cioppini, sea urchin, and green pea ravioli. Alice makes an effort at polite conversation asking Moira if she reads Jenny's work. This inadvertently creates a tension that furthers Moira's outsider status as Moira replies that she is a "computer technician", thus implying that she wouldn't have anything to contribute. The conversation returns to Jenny's new book, her recent hospitalization, and Tina and Bette's daughter. Moira attempts to join the conversation by asking Tina and Bette about their baby. Trying to relate, Moira offers, "You know a bunch of women back in my dyke community in Wilmette, they're doing that too." This is the first time the word "dyke" has been positively used on the series and it appears to be not received well. At best, the "ladies" seem bored with Moira and at worst put off by her simple language and crude characterization of her sexuality. The conversation comes to a halt as the "ladies" smile sympathetically at Moira.

Visiting the *ladies'* room, Moira is shown again experiencing the common (to butches) bathroom problem. Moira exits the bathroom stall and walks toward the sink where two very feminine women are touching up their make-up in the vanity mirror. One of the young women is wearing a short dress, heels, dangling earrings, and has her hair in an updo. The other wears

her long brown hair down, along with a stylish tank top, heels, and jeans (presumably designer). Both of these women easily fit into their surroundings. Revealing that expectations of gender conformity cross class and geographical boundaries and pervade common sense understanding of what it means to be a woman, one of them cynically looks Moira up and down as she approaches. While Moira washes her hands, one woman whispers something to the other, they both look over their shoulders at Moira and begin to snicker.

Moira returns from the bathroom to find that their food has arrived. She looks painfully at her “salad” which appears to be a glass of tall grass with enoki mushrooms and bits of unrecognizable things on the side. In contrast, the “ladies” are delightedly chattering about their meals, clearly reveling in what for them is a sumptuous experience. Despite her efforts, Moira is clearly a misfit and for the most part is excluded from equal participation in the dinner conversation. Lara announces to the group that she and Dana have bought tickets to the South of France for a food and wine tour. Alice (who is jealous of Lara) interrupts to offer Moira some of her lobster. Moira politely declines, but Alice presses saying, “Well, it’s not going to bite you.” What she really seems to be saying is, “Don’t look so unhappy. You should be grateful we’re being nice to you. We’re not going to bite you.” Classism and butch phobia work together, effectively alienating Moira from the group. Seeming to pity Moira, Bette and Tina also offer her lobster. With all eyes on her, Moira declines again, but takes the opportunity to share with the group something she knows about lobsters.

You don’t have to put a lid on the pot when you cook female lobsters...When you cook a pot of male lobsters, they all realize they’re in this pot of boiling water, they all start totally freaking out. They’re like ‘fuck, we gotta get out of here’ and they start making these little ladders and helping each other get out of the pot. So

you have to put a lid on the pot to keep them inside. But female lobsters, you don't have to put a lid on the pot because once they realize they're in a pot of boiling water, they all just start grabbing each other, and like holding each other down. They're like, 'if I'm gonna die, everyone's gonna die.' None of them wants to let any of the other ones get out of the pot. It's a real shame isn't it?

Given the context in which Moira shares this information, it seems that Moira is imparting an analogy to her own experience. Moira seems to be suggesting that when threatened, women sometimes take each down the same way that female lobsters do when faced with boiling water. She seems to be implying that this phenomenon is currently playing out in the restaurant. Moira's analogy is evocative of Fellow's and Razack's (1998) analysis of a "toehold on respectability" and Foucault's (1982) concept of "dividing practices." Both of these analyses speak to the way in which marginalized groups compete for survival by forsaking each other. Moira's concluding remark implies "we're all in this together, we should take care of each other." Unfortunately, the "ladies" either miss the point or chose not to acknowledge it. Instead Carmen jokes, "Wow, those crazy female lobsters, they just get ya sometimes!" Everybody laughs, and conversation returns to the mundane. Looking hurt and deflated, Moira slowly looks at the faces around the table. She leans over to Jenny and whispers that she is going to go. Jenny follows her out, trying to persuade her to stay. What follows is a telling scene in which the group proceeds to discuss Moira and her relationship with Jenny.

"She comes from a place where you have to define yourself as either or. It's probably just the only language she has to describe herself."

"She has the language of those shit kicking boots and (imitating Moira) that lumberjack walk" (laughter ensues).

“I’m just surprised that she wanted to role play like that especially after everything that Jenny’s been through.”

“Well, she could be completely different in the bedroom.”

“Maybe she’s butch on the streets and femme in the sheets.”

Dressed in a fancy men’s dress shirt and tie, Shane tellingly advises, “You know what, what difference does it make whether someone is butch or femme we should just leave labels alone and let people be who they are.”

There a number of assumptions implicit in this conversation. Imbued with class bias, Bette’s remark that Moira “comes from a place where you have to define yourself” suggests that Moira is backwards whereas she and her friends are more evolved. Unlike Moira, Bette and the other *L Word* “ladies” come from a place where definition is not only unnecessary, but undesirable and passé. The use of the word “place” suggests a literal, physical place, the American mid-west and, at the same time, is a metaphor for gritty, working class images of days gone by. In contrast, *The L Word* “ladies” primarily come from a sophisticated world where wealth, style, beauty, and femininity are the norm. Labels are seen as ghettoizing; only posing limitations to privilege. Moreover, Moira’s presence serves as a distasteful reminder of the uncivilized, butch, bull dyke, an image we as viewers are instructed to distance ourselves as far as possible from.

Moira’s depiction and her arrival onto the LA scene is highly evocative of pop culture mythology. Popular imaginings have the scary Other come like the boogie man out of nowhere (in this case a small, mid-western town that none of the “ladies” seem to be able to remember the name of), intruding on the peaceful, perfect (lipstick lesbian) paradise. This imagery plays up on the fear mongering perpetuated by sexologists of the creepy “mannish” lesbian who “manifests a forceful and dominant personality and enjoys seducing weaker women” (Caprio, 1954, p. 14).

Moreover, the character is intended to evoke stereotypical images of butches as unattractive, boorish, simple-minded, and psychologically disturbed.

Most of the characters in the previous exchange were not identified because all but Shane, seem to be saying in their own way that they don't approve of butch (or femme). Shane however, attempts a more even-handed position. Her concluding remark allows that it might be okay to be butch (or femme), as long as it's unobtrusively not named as such. This stance is consistent with Shane's class background as well as her ambiguously butch gender presentation. Previous episodes teach us that Shane has working class roots. She never finished high school and grew up in foster care. It is implied that prior to becoming a financially successful hairdresser, Shane was involved in prostitution. While she has somehow climbed the upper class ladder of respectability, like Carmen, her position in the elite echelons is perhaps less certain than it is for her friends. Popular amongst her friends and very popular with viewers, *The L Word* would have much at stake in assigning Shane a butch identity. Because the butch lesbian has been so vigorously maligned in dominant culture, *The L Word* would be at risk of losing viewers. By having a character who is read as butch, but who does not identify as such, *The L Word* can appease lesbians who (knowingly or not) appreciate butches, while simultaneously avoiding the alienation of (some of those same) viewers who reject butch. Shane's construction as a tomboy is masculine enough to be read by lesbians as butch, while simultaneously sufficiently muted to tow the line of acceptable femininity. Her popularity affords significant influence in disciplining lesbian subjectivity. Moreover, Shane's recognizably feminine attributes serve as a disciplinary function; demarcating the "good," acceptable lesbian from Moira, the degenerate or "bad" butch lesbian. The consistent message Shane imparts is that to avoid social ostracism, one must at least minimally comply with the gender binary. In her words

and in her actions, Shane instructs a liberal “live and let live” but “don’t make a show of it,” attitude.

Jenny and Moira however, are seen doing just that – making a show of it. Their gender presentations announce a butch/femme dynamic that is viewed by the group as role playing. In contrast, their own relationships are taken for granted as authentically real and by extension superior. It is implied that desiring butch women is akin to desiring men – why would “Jenny want to role play like that after everything she’s been through.” Although exactly what Jenny has been through is not made explicit, followers of *The L Word* know that Jenny was sexually abused by a man and had a marriage to a man that ended in a nasty divorce. What Tina is really asking is “why would Jenny want to be with a man?” The tacit implication here plays on the dominant discourse that being butch is about wanting to be a man. In its refusal to grant a space for masculine-identified women, *The L Word* reproduces binary gender discourses. That masculinity equates with maleness begins to play out more explicitly as a prevailing theme through to the last episode of the final season.

Reproducing the Gender Binary

The second diagnostic criteria for GID, criteria B, makes pathological a “Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex” (APA, 2000, p. 581). Soon after Moira is introduced in the series, *The L Word* begins to explicitly perform this discourse. Four episodes into Moira’s appearance on *The L Word* there begins a blurring of Moira’s gender identity from female-identified butch, to male-identified trans person. Moira is introduced to Billy Blakely, a flamboyant queer entertainment promoter. Billy is immediately attracted to Moira and is quite taken aback to hear her introduced as such. He appears unable to

reconcile Moira's masculine appearance with her feminine sounding name. Despite inviting Moira to a party where "there are people like us – some of whom have changed their bodies to match up to their brains and some who have changed their brains to match up their bodies," Billy instantly believes Moira to be a closeted trans person. Surprisingly, it seems that in his world there is no such thing as butch. Billy seems to take the position that gender is binary, therefore a masculine female must in fact be trapped in the wrong body. Moreover, it appears taken for granted that viewers share the belief in an essential or core self. Billy thus makes it his mission to assist Moira in realizing her *true* male self.

Billy greets Moira and Jenny at his party and welcomes Moira "home." Again assuming a contradiction between Moira's name and her appearance, he asks her if she goes by another name. Jenny chimes in that she sometimes goes by Max. Billy introduces Max to an FTM trans guy who is in the process of writing a novel about a trans character. Describing the book to Max he explains that it is about "the life of a guy who becomes a boy, what he goes through, small town, realizing that he's really not a she, girlfriends, family shit, T, top surgery." This scene performs the discourse that there are right bodies and wrong bodies. In describing the novel as "the life of a *guy who becomes a boy*" the author is taking the position that though he didn't always know it, his female born character was always male, but he needed the assistance of GID and its technologies to correct his mistaken gender. While it is not entirely clear what it means to be a "guy," the implication of this statement and of GID suggest that female masculinity automatically goes hand in hand with testosterone injections and top surgery.

Integral to the GID diagnosis, the wrong body discourse makes normal gender as binary. Designating appropriate and inappropriate gendered behaviour, GID authorizes male and female as immediately identifiable and mutually discreet categories of gender. Boys are to follow the

established rules for appropriate boy behavior (“rough-and-tumble play,” “competitive sports,” “interest in cars or trucks”), while girls are to conform to their own gender regulations (“dolls...feminine dress-up or role-play activities,” “urinate in a sitting position”) (APA, 2000). Quite simply, Moira is too masculine to possibly be a woman. As has been the theme thus far, it is again implied that Moira does not fit as she is. It is now insinuated however, that Moira, despite never indicating any confusion or distress about gender identity, is experiencing Gender Identity Disorder and hence requires the aid of medical interventions such as testosterone *treatment*, and breast removal to cure her pathology and correct her misguided gender presentation. These instructions undermine a female-identified butch subjectivity. They both reflect and reproduce butch as a deviant subject position, thus reaffirming female femininity as the more superior and sought-after presentation.

The message that Moira is incomprehensible as female is underlined further when she later shows up to meet the “ladies” dressed in a fancy men’s suit. This time the group responds much more positively than they had at their first meeting with Moira. Indicative of the connection between class and gender presentation, Moira appears both less ambiguously gendered and more upwardly mobile prompting comments that “she looks amazing,” “like a hot guy.” In other words, Moira is beginning to fit better and fitting, we are told through praise and rewards, is a good thing.

The disciplining of gender normativity is achieved through the careful articulation of both the rewards and the punishments of conformity/non-conformity. Scenes like the one above are intermingled with prevailing warning scenes which instruct on the perils of gender ambiguity. Via Moira/Max, *The L Word* performs social ostracism and violence as consequences of gender

insubordination. The following scene, in which Moira goes for her first LA job interview, is yet another example which makes clear these consequences, thus inducing our gender conformity.

“So Moira, that’s a girl’s name isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I’m a girl.”

“I wasn’t saying I didn’t know if you were a girl, I was just asking about the name.”

Conceding that her qualifications look good, her White male interviewer probes further, “Great letter of recommendation from Shaldean. How did you get on with the folks there?”

“Really well.”

“Hmph, so no problems with you being (pause), you know, hard to peg?”

“Hard to peg?”

“You’re kinda neither fish nor fowl Moira, if you know what I mean, and I’m not saying we would discriminate against you because that is one thing we don’t do here at intecmode, but we’re looking for someone who is a team player. We’re team players here.”

“Yeah, I’m a team player.”

“What side do you bat for Moira?” (chuckles)

Moira’s interviewer takes aim at both her butch gender presentation and her lesbian sexuality. The combination of female masculinity and same sex desire appears to deeply unsettle her interviewer. By explicitly making Moira Other and situating her outside the norm, this exchange instructs clearly on the expectations of a binary gender system. To avoid scorn, ridicule, and quite literally unemployment, one must be unambiguously recognizable as either “fish” or

“fowl.” As the sole gender non-conformist positioned against an entire cast of conventionally beautiful women, Moira is cast as inferior. Constructing Moira as moving back and forth in a dance of fitting in as male and not fitting in as butch, *The L Word* at once exposes the ignorance, homophobia, sexism and more specifically butch phobia experienced by masculine appearing women and at the same time makes normal heteronormative, common sense understanding of gender and upper class superiority.

Hinting again at the “wrong body” discourse (formerly the discourse of inversion), Billy tells Moira “you are the cutest boy I have ever seen.” He asks her if she is doing hormones and offers to set her up with testosterone, a steroid hormone that stimulates the development of male secondary sexual characteristics. Evoking (gay) male stereotypes, Moira and Billy also engage in casual sex with each other. Caught getting head from Billy, Moira pleads for Jenny’s understanding,

“Look, it’s just, he made me feel like a real guy, you know. It wasn’t just like some girl with this thing in her pants.”

To be desired as a man, by a gay man, assuages Moira’s insecure masculinity. The sexual encounter seems to me a discursive strategy aimed at further constructing Moira as innately male while at the same time disavowing butches i.e.: girls with a “thing in their pants.” It again invokes the discourse that butches are just poor knock-offs of the real deal, thereby not respectable or authentically masculine in their own right. Moreover, we are again instructed that masculinity is the sole domain of men. It is therefore not enough to be butch, one must *be* a “real guy.”

“the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics...or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex” (p. 581).

Not long after her introduction to Billy, Moira signals her intention to be acknowledged as male by consistently going by the name Max. Max decides to further realize his “real guy” aspirations through top surgery. Because the character no longer identifies as female, the rest of my analysis uses male pronouns in reference to Max. Attempting to explain to Dana his experience of being in the wrong body, Max relates his first suicide attempt, “I knew this wasn’t my life. I was like, I dunno, I thought if I died and came back, God would put me in the *right* body” (emphasis added). Like the GID diagnosis, Max performs and reinscribes the assumption that there are not more than two discreet and dichotomous gender categories. Discursively reinforcing the marriage of sex and gender, Max instructs viewers that masculinity and maleness are naturally connected. Thus if you are butch you are in the “wrong” body.

Responding to the current FTM debate among feminists, Kit, *The L Word’s* only straight identified main character appeals to Max’s decision to have top surgery by questioning essentialist assumptions about gender. Asking rhetorically, “What’s male inside? What’s female inside?” Kit further questions, “Why can’t you be the butchest butch in the world and still keep your body?” In addition to being the only straight character on the program, Kit is the oldest and heaviest main character. She is also one of few women of colour and is characterized as an alcoholic. These designations consign Kit as Other. As such, her challenge to essentialism carries no authority. While heterosexuality is usually a signifier of privilege, in this instance it marks Kit as an outsider. In other words, Kit doesn’t really know what she is talking about. As a straight-identified minority, Kit is able to detract from the show’s dominant discourses without threatening *The L Word* or its prescribed homonormativity.

Heteronormative Ambition

Unable to accept Kit's appeal, Max has absolutely no desire to "be the butchest butch."

Increasingly Max's main objective appears to be fitting as close to heteronormativity as possible.

He expresses admiration for Jenny's ex-husband Tim and his pregnant new wife Becky who appear to be "normal" middle class, White folks. Seemingly envious of Tim and Becky, Max comments to Jenny, "Good job with a kid on the way; doesn't seem so bad to me." Jenny who is grateful to have escaped some of the trappings of hetero normalness retorts, "Max would you wanna be some oblivious guy that lives in the suburbs and has a wife, kids, an SUV, who just lets all the rotten shit in the world go by, trying not to let it touch him." Apparently unmoved Max responds, "I don't think there's anything wrong with trying to be happy." Performing and thus promoting the dominant aspirations of most North Americans – the ever pervasive American Dream, our own desire for happiness is manipulated as we are persuaded to identify or at least sympathize with Max's desire. Appealing to the commonly held belief that prosperity and success are within the reach of everyone who tries hard enough and that both are the key to happiness, *The L Word* and GID further instruct that happiness requires conformity. According to these discourses, those who do not conform will experience "all the rotten shit in the world." Elevating individualism and liberal ideology, we are reminded that individual happiness supercedes community or group well being. Moreover, happiness as performed by *The L Word* is tied to gender conformity, Whiteness and upper class mobility. Butch, we are directed, is antithetical to happiness.

In keeping with his heteronormative, middle class aspirations Max lands himself a white collar job at a predominantly male company. It is in fact the same information technology company that had previously rejected Moira for a lesser position. Rather than confront the

blatant discrimination Max is celebratory. He readily embraces his new found patriarchal privilege. Seeming to acknowledge the “*perceived* cultural advantages” (APA, 2000, p. 576, emphasis added) of patriarchy, GID instructs that “*merely* a desire for...cultural advantages” (APA, 2000, p. 576, emphasis added) is inadequate to warrant the diagnosis. This is a significant discursive shift from the late eighteenth hundreds when a desire for male privilege was equated with wanting to be a man. Viewing a desire for male privilege as “natural,” early sexologist Havelock Ellis “presume[d] that in a male-dominated world, everyone at least symbolically would want to be a man” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 78). Demonstrating that the designations male and female are socially, historically and rigidly constructed through a patriarchal lens, Faderman (1991) notes that in the later part of the nineteenth century feminists, in their quest for education and lucrative work (in other words male privilege), were also viewed as inappropriately performing their gender; thus suffering from the disease of inversion.

While there are likely several factors that construct one’s decision to transition, I believe it is erroneous for the *DSM* to insist that “cultural advantages” are not enough to warrant a diagnosis and further that such advantages can be separated out as discrete from other contributing factors. The desire to occupy a male body, particularly a White male body, cannot be viewed separately from the relative privileges associated with that subjectivity. Nor should the significance of such privileges be underestimated. Relatively speaking, “cultural advantages” are inextricably connected to White men, just as the material experience of lesbianism is inextricably connected with heterosexism. In the context of *The L Word*, the substantial privileges associated with being perceived as White and male, must be considered within the context of the repression Moira has experienced as a direct result of being a woman and a butch. In other words, the desire for male identification can be alternatively interpreted as a desire to not have to live with the material

affects of a female body in a heteronormative world. As Feinberg's (1993) Jess articulates, "I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel trapped" (p. 158-159). In a binary gender system, maleness is the only way out for non-conforming females. GID behaves however as if the cultural privileges benefiting males can be identified independently from other constructs of subjectivity. It assumes for example, that one's desire for a deeper voice or a flat chest can be objectively viewed separate from the advantages embodied within these features as a direct result of their association with maleness. This supposition play downs the significant material consequences of patriarchy and assumes that such advantages are distinct from other factors related to "cross-gender identification" (APA, 2000). As *The L Word* proves, the consequences of patriarchy, heterosexism, neo-liberalism, and capitalism have profound and far-reaching disciplinary effects on our subjectivity.

Seduced by the promise of a "normal" life, Max appears to want to move as far as possible away from a queer existence. Suggesting that straight people's right to comfort is more important than queer existence, Max attempts to discourage Jenny from slow dancing with her new overtly-feminine lover Claude in a fancy hotel bar.

"You guys, it's a straight club, you're gonna make people feel uncomfortable."

"Then they deserve to feel uncomfortable, don't you think?"

"No, I don't think anyone deserves to feel uncomfortable."

"Max, I don't understand why you want to be like these people? You seem so much more interesting as who you are."

"How do you know who I am? You don't know who the fuck I am! How do you know I'm not like these people?"

“Max, you’re great the way you are and the way you were, and you know what happens when you walk in this room?”

“What?”

“People start watching you, they’re looking at you closely and at first they think that you’re one of them but then they look at little more closely and they begin to feel uneasy because they realize that you’re not. You’re always going to be one of the others. You’re like us.”

Wanting desperately to fit in to the mainstream, Max responds defiantly, “You don’t know that.”

Exploiting the social ostracism that virtually all queer people experience at some point, this scene creates a tension as the viewer is confronted with Max’s understandable desire for acceptance and the cost that acceptance necessitates. Max seems prepared to pay any price for mainstream approval, including forsaking his association with queerness. His appeal to Jenny and Claude suggests that Max is afraid his lesbian friends will embarrass him, and perhaps implicate him as queer. Jenny and Claude advance a persuasive plea for being proud of who you are, regardless of what others think.

Intent on fitting into the straight world, Max begins dating his boss’s straight, upper class daughter. Unlike in earlier scenes, this new more refined character has grown comfortable frequenting upper class establishments and wearing fancy clothes. Posing as a straight biological man, Max woos his new love interest using normative romantic conventions. His efforts to be just like everybody else are thwarted however, as Jenny’s prediction begins to ring true.

“D. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (p. 581).

The final criteria for GID diagnosis again ignores the social construction of gender as well as the significant consequences on the individual for non-conformity. Criteria D assumes it is individual “disturbance” that causes “distress” rather than dominant ideology and prescriptive behaviour which dictates who is “normal” and who is “disordered” (APA, 2000). While performing the distress produced by patriarchal and heterosexist discourses, *The L Word* simultaneously reproduces the very same knowledge and power relations that engender discrimination and self-loathing.

Despite Max’s characterization as a wannabe straight male, he is excluded from Tina and her new male partner’s cocktail party. Attended by rich, White straight couples along with Tina’s conventionally beautiful, rich and mainly White lesbian friends, Max is ironically perhaps too queer for a mixed party. By attempting to prove that lesbians can look like women straight men desire, the party performance appears, on the surface, intended to disrupt stereotypical notions of what a lesbian looks like. Accepting the terms of heteronormativity, this performance however, employs what Foucault (1980) has termed a reverse discourse, whereby absolving the crime of lesbianism relies on venerating the good, gender-conforming lesbian, while tacitly denigrating the butch. Though no longer identifying as a lesbian, Max’s presence would likely reinforce the party crowd’s image of the manly lesbian, thus undermining *The L Word’s* homonormative objective. Rather than expand the discourse of what a lesbian looks like, this scene erases butch and at the same time performs (via the male guests) the discourse that feminine women can’t really be lesbians; in effect, diluting lesbianism all together.

Embracing Trans

Struggling to find his place in the world, Max meets and hires Grace as his new IT assistant.

During their first meeting they briefly discuss the state of butchness in LA.

Grace laments, “I miss San Francisco, there are pretty much no butch women in LA.”

“You think so?”

“Well no culture, no community. Everyone’s all into high fashion. Female masculinity isn’t celebrated here.”

Pause “Yeah, I guess it’s not really.”

“Is that why you became a man?”

“Why I *became* a man? I am a man. Intrinsicly, you know.”

Max’s insistence on his essential maleness operates to further reinforce the repetitive discourse that gender is innate to who we are. Max is presented here not as a female who then becomes a male, but as someone who has always been a male, but in the wrong body. As such, he is cast as not really *transitioning* at all, but rightfully returned to his proper gender. This discourse targets the body as wrong rather than the discourses that narrowly authorize female and male in the first place. In this instance, *The L Word* (via Grace) counters this discourse, offering an alternative perspective on female masculinity that had previously been stifled. Lamenting the lack of butches in LA, Grace takes for granted that butches are valuable, desirable and “normal.” She suggests that in other places, communities are built around supporting and fostering butch identity and culture. Moreover, Grace makes normal the celebration of female masculinity and, more importantly, connects its absence to FTM transitioning. Whether the lack of reverence or space for female masculinity is a factor in Max’s transition or not, Grace makes visible the

difficulties of being butch in LA and introduces a homonormative sensibility predicated on the desirability of butches.

Until this point, Max has been entirely surrounded by people who have adopted dualistic assumptions about gender. As Max's relationship with Grace develops, he is provided the space to explore his gender identity. Signifying his relinquishment of straight, heteropatriarchal capitalism, Max eventually quits his job. Grace and Max celebrate by making out. As with Jenny in the past, Max is reminiscent of a stone butch. This time however his lover does not look for him to play the stereotypical "girl."

"Let me touch you. Don't hide from me Max. I wanna feel your body."

"It's not my body. I mean, it'll be my body in a couple of weeks, when I get the surgery."

"You were hot for me just now."

"Yeah."

"That was your body that felt good."

"I don't feel comfortable with it."

"I do."

"You do?"

"Yeah. I think you're so hot and all I wanna do is suck on your cock. You turn me on so much. Will you let me?"

Grace renders normal what others see as an incongruity between Max's body and his brain. She does not pathologize Max but instead assures him that he is desirable as he is. She lets Max know that for her, gender is not about the physical body parts one actually has but is a state of mind. Grace celebrates both Max's masculinity and his female body. In doing so, she grants

Max permission to enjoy and explore his sexuality and his body. Now embodying a more ambiguous, decidedly queer, male subjectivity, we see Max expressing second thoughts about going through with top surgery. However, rather than expand what it means to be a woman, Max is seen challenging what it means to be a man.

Season five begins by building on Max's queer sensibility. Max decides not to have top surgery, asserting instead, "for me, I guess in the end I decided that I felt enough of a guy as is, without the surgery." Here there is a blurring of the gender binary as *The L Word* grants space for reflecting on taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and specifically what it means to be male. However, while *The L Word* appears to reconsider its previous instruction that gender is binary, this message is seriously undermined by the character's diminishing presence. As Max embodies a more ambiguous gender identity, the character begins to occupy an increasingly marginal role. The sex scenes for example are striking in their absence. Relative to the other main characters, the series has few sex scenes involving Moira/Max. This differs strongly from the rest of the series where we see abundant explicit sex between the ultra feminine characters.

Perhaps less threatening and more titillating, *The L Word* opts to perform copious girl on girl hetero-male fantasy sex over explicit sex involving ambiguously gendered people. *The L Word* chooses to capitalize on the eroticization of a particular kind of lesbian, while simultaneously denying the arguably more prevalent lesbian sexual experience. In doing so, *The L Word* reifies the image of the undesirable, sexually unappealing butch lesbian (and other queer bodies who do not fit heteronormative prescriptions of desire) and attempts to normalize, heterosexualize or straighten out lesbian sex via the lipstick lesbian. Theorizing about lesbian representation in mainstream media, Ciasullo (2001) posits,

The mainstream lesbian body is at once sexualized and desexualized: on the one hand, she is made into an object of desire for straight audiences through her heterosexualization, a process achieved by representing the lesbian as embodying a hegemonic femininity and thus, for mainstream audiences, as looking ‘just like’ conventionally attractive straight women; on the other hand, because the representation of desire between two women is usually suppressed in these images, she is de-homosexualized (p. 578).

While *The L Word* exploits rather than suppresses the representation of desire between conventionally feminine bodies, I take the position that these bodies are still “de-homosexualized.” As I discussed earlier, the lesbian femme has not, and is not really considered a lesbian. *The L Word* reminds us of this in previous scenes where, for example, Tina’s male friends are shown scrutinizing the “ladies” lesbian credibility at her party and by having Tina return for a period to male partners. As Max’s body is not in any way conventionally feminine nor unambiguously male, his sexuality cannot be de-homosexualized or made normal. Occupying an overtly queer body, Max’s sexual encounters are designated unrepresentable to the mainstream audience.

Rather than creating a hot love affair between Max and Grace that could more fully explore the nuances of queer sexuality and the breadth of gender identity, the scene described above is the only sex scene involving the two. *The L Word* plays it safe by focusing primarily on one dimensional characters who are easily digested by the mainstream, only venturing ever so briefly into queer territory. In doing so, *The L Word* reconfirms the deviancy of gender non-conformity, constructing my subjectivity in such a way as to be wary of this designation. While far from achieving complete success (I am still after all, a lover of butches), this discourse ensures I am acutely aware of the potential consequences for my transgressions. When necessary (as in the

threat of violence), this discourse has taught me to take measures to minimize the risks of gender deviance to myself and my partner (for example not holding hands, nor correcting people who assume my girlfriend is a he). Through bio-power, *The L Word* is thus complicit in disciplining vigilance among gender deviants.

Max's diminished presence on *The L Word* coincides with his exclusion from lesbian space. As Max begins to assert a definitively trans identity he is depicted as increasingly alienated from lesbian community. This storyline is reflective of the current tension within lesbian communities about the place of FTM trans people within feminist and lesbian spaces. Max does not feel a sense of belonging with the straight world and, despite greater acceptance from the "ladies", remains an outsider. However, Max's outsider status from the rest of *The L Word* characters did not begin with his gender transition. Max's position as Other has been a constant since his entry as a butch lesbian. Whether trans or butch, the instruction seems to be that ambiguously gendered people (either by virtue of appearance or identity) do not belong in lesbian communities.

Pregnant Men and Bearded Ladies

Season five of *The L Word* concludes with Max beginning a romantic affair with Tom, an out gay man. This relationship carries into the final season, which sees Max return, almost instantaneously, to a more fixed gender identity as a man. Without segueing, Max is seen happily involved with Grace, and in the next scene having sex with Tom. Neither Grace nor Max's trans identity are ever mentioned again. Max suddenly appears in a doctor's office with a full Grizzly Adamsesque beard, making final arrangements for his top surgery scheduled for later that week. On the one hand, we are again directed that gender is binary – Max once more

inhabits the “wrong body” – on the other, however, it instructs us that indistinctly gendered people are capricious, confused/confusing freaks whose gender identity is not to be taken seriously. *The L Word* makes the character Moira/ Max expendable by conflating butch and trans as degenerative subject positions that can readily be adapted for entertainment value.

Playing on contemporary and sensationalistic news coverage of the pregnant man, it is at this point that Max discovers he is pregnant. Within a context of taken for granted assumptions about gender as binary, Max is shown approaching the receptionist for his abortion. Expressing utter disbelief the receptionist says, “Sir, is this a practical joke, I am calling security.” Intended to inspire the amused delight of viewers, Max is forced to proclaim his FTM status to the entire waiting room who stare at the man/woman in fascinated horror. Soon after, we learn that Max is too far along in his pregnancy to have an abortion. He must carry the child to term and postpone his surgery. One minute butch, the next straight, then trans, gay and finally pregnant, butch we are told, is at best a passing phase.

Consistent with Foucault’s (1980) repressive hypothesis, the intention here is not so much about prohibiting gender non-conformity, but manipulating it for the purpose of self-regulation. As Williamson (1986) explains within systems of domination “we need the Other, even as politically we seek to eliminate it” (p. 112). By exploiting common sense, *The L Word* uses Max’s bearded face and pregnant belly to represent the extreme end of gender absurdity. As Max’s swollen belly grows, so too do our instructions to see him as an object of amusement and ridicule. Drawing on the legend of the outrageous bearded lady who occupied the circus freak shows of the 19th and 20th centuries, the pregnant (bearded) man is intended to shock and excite us. Inciting pleasure, he also serves the dual purpose of procuring investment to gender compliance. As Foucault (1980) articulates,

The medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is they function with a double impetus: pleasure and power (p. 45).

Intended to undermine Max's masculinity, Jenny constantly reminds Max (and viewers) that Max is a woman – a soon-to-be mother. We are instructed that masculine identified or not, one cannot escape biology. *The L Word* restores masculinity to the possession of men, instructing that whether butch or trans, masculinity on a female body will ultimately be revealed as a charade. As *The L Word* draws to its final conclusion, Max is again seen struggling with a body that feels painfully alien to him. We are directed that like butch, this trans man will always be a failed male wannabe, somewhat of an amusing sideshow attraction.

Conclusion

As instruments of bio-power, the *DSM* and *The L Word* construct knowledge and power relations. Consistent with Foucault's analysis, GID and *The L Word* authorize gender non-conformity as disordered and prescribe scientific technologies which either through influence or medical intervention, are intended to bring the body into compliance. Through the use of sanctioning and regulatory measures, rewards and punishments, *The L Word* and the *DSM* discipline our subjectivity in compliance with a binary conception of gender.

The repudiation of butch remains strongly tied to class and a desire for respectability. Through the character Moira/Max, *The L Word* recirculates the historical disavowal of lower class (often non-White) butches by (primarily White) upwardly mobile lesbians. Indeed, the "ladies" instruction to rebuff Moira is as a result of Moira's working class, masculine demeanor. It is through both the desire for rewards such as respectability, and the desire to avoid

repercussions that we become complicit with the discourse. To comprehend Moira as Other, I must become the “normal,” respectable onlooker for whom the discourse makes sense. In other words, I must disdain butch and its association to female masculinity and working class culture. To achieve this, *The L Word* deploys seductively packaged and romanticized appeals to heteronormativity and upper-class lifestyles while at the same time, simultaneously performing dominant discourses that construct butch as contemptuous, dangerous, unfathomable, bizarre and disordered.

Discursively advancing binary conceptions of gender and heteronormativity, *The L Word* and the *DSM* reify gender roles as natural and innate. Making normal stereotypical understanding of male and female, these texts reaffirm gender as two distinct and dichotomous categories. Moreover, we are instructed that masculinity and femininity discretely belong to the categories male and female respectively. In its refusal to grant a space for female masculinity, *The L Word* and GID construct the desire for male treatment or a propensity towards so called male behavior and appearance as akin to wanting to *be* a man. Through the “right bodies/wrong bodies” discourse, *The L Word* and GID make butch pathologically defective. We are instructed that as gender dissidents, butches exist outside the norm. Accordingly, the butch is consigned to pathologization, vilification and erasure.

At the same time, appropriate femininity is both prescribed and valorized by *The L Word* and the *DSM*. We are instructed to model the appearance, behaviours and aspirations of *The L Word's* “ladies.” This instruction serves the dual role of constructing hegemonic femininity as admirable and making female expressions of masculinity degenerate and deficient. “Naturally,” it is thus dangerous to be butch. In order to avoid the (understandable) repercussions associated

with gender deviance, we are enticed to construct queer subjectivity in compliance with the discourse that makes butch undesirable.

The next chapter expands on these ideas. In particular, I take up Fellows and Razack's (1998) concept of a "toehold on respectability." Advancing my assertion that queer subjectivity is being constructed in accordance with a binary conception of gender, I argue that at the expense of those who do not conform, queer communities (particularly more privileged queer communities) are being seduced by neo-liberal, capitalist enticements towards normalization and consumption. In constructing ourselves as "normal," I further argue that we become consumable within mainstream culture. I discuss how our adherence to normative standards relies on "technologies of the self" and the disavowal of those subjectivities constructed as more degenerate than ourselves; ultimately upholding hegemonic heterosexuality.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

Liberalism, we are instructed, has paved the way for unprecedented tolerance and acceptance of gays and lesbians, yet dominant discourses, as performed by *The L Word* and authorized by the *DSM*, confirm that mainstream society is not quite so lenient. Associated with vulgarity, perversion and deviance, *The L Word* could not create a series around the butch lesbian (unless it was a comedy and the butches were the joke). Only a very specific lesbian could represent *desirable* lesbian subjectivity. Moreover, capitalism and heteropatriarchy only *allow* the consumable (gender conforming) queer subject to exist. Repetitively (re)producing the discourse that gender is binary and equating failure to unambiguously pass as either male or female, with enduring unhappiness, *The L Word* and the *DSM* instruct us to renounce the butch subject. We are made rather to want to *be* the desired queer subject. Deploying assimilationist ideals that dictate heteronormativity and neo-liberal appeals to individuality and upper class superiority, *The L Word* and the *DSM* are effective and productive in disappearing butch.

The message endorsed by *The L Word* is that you can be queer so long as you don't look queer. *The L Word*, the *DSM* and western culture more broadly offer two models of acceptable queerness, both of which, not incidentally, assimilate us into binary conceptions of gender. So long as other markers of acceptability are met (such as physical beauty as conceived by Whiteness, upward class mobility, physical ability, heteronormative or asexual behaviour), female assigned queers are conditionally *allowed* to be stereotypically attractive lipstick lesbians or passing trans men. The former requires butches to tone down their butchness by emulating female Hollywood role models that both intimate and renounce butch. Similar to *The L Word*, real life lesbians such as Ellen offer feminized versions of ourselves who hint at butch while simultaneously appearing in advertisements for CoverGirl. The latter option which constructs

butches as wannabe men, discursively consigns butch to being pathologically defective. As performed on *The L Word* and authorized by the *DSM*, this discourse instructs that butches are not really women, but men trapped in the wrong body.

Instead of questioning the gender rules which cause Moira extreme grief and pain, *The L Word* assumes and upholds such rules. In the same way that *The L Word* presupposes Moira was born into the wrong gender, it takes for granted and makes normal for women, wearing makeup, dressing stylishly and femininely, slender bodies, youthfulness, and wealth. Rather than provide an alternate story that exposes butchphobia without negating butchness, such as having butch characters who in the face of rigid gender conformity, proudly claim their butch identity, whilst creating their own communities in which they are respected leaders and greatly desired lovers, *The L Word* instead makes normal butchphobia. Implied as consequential to gender non-conformity, Moira's painful experiences are employed as a common sense explanation for her subsequent transition to a male identity. In doing so, *The L Word* not only disavows butch but erases the history of butch resistance and its significance to lesbian communities.

The discourses (re)produced by *The L Word* and the *DSM* work together, mutually reinforcing and bolstering each other's discursive power. While the way in which *The L Word* speaks to GID may seem less obvious, it is a reciprocal exchange. GID is both produced by and productive of the dominant discourses employed by *The L Word*. Though the *DSM* appeared long before *The L Word*, the discourses disseminated by *The L Word* predate and construct the *DSM*. As Cheek (2004) elucidates,

[T]exts not only represent and reflect a certain version of reality, they also play a part in the very construction and maintenance of that reality itself. There is a dynamic

relationship between the text and the context in which the text is produced. Texts are both constitutive of and, in turn, constructed by their context (p. 1144).

Thus while the strategies of recital may have shifted, the discourse that butch is defective, pathological and Other has remained fairly stagnant over time.

Drawing again on Foucault's (1980) concept of bio-power, we find that GID is anatomopolitics in its most literal sense. Through the pedagogization of children's sexuality and the psychiatrization of perversity, GID compels the body to conform to the gender binary, thus achieving its function of political docility. In the same way, using rewards and sanctions, *The L Word* employs dominant discourses to induce the body's compliance with gender normativity.

The pedagogization of children and the psychiatrization of perversity are intricately tied to the nuclear family and by extension to capitalism. In his article "Capitalism and Gay Identity," D'Emilio (1993) discusses how the ideology of capitalism operates to ensure the preservation of the nuclear family. He argues that it is through the nuclear family and the reproduction of workers that capitalism has been able to flourish. Historically, all non-procreative sexual acts were considered a threat to the family and therefore perverse (D'Emilio, 1993; Foucault, 1980). Psychiatrizing such perversities was/is a way of controlling individuals and regulating the population. Within the nuclear family, parents were seen as primarily responsible for molding or "pedagogizing" appropriate procreative behaviour. D'Emilio (1993) contends, "Ideologically, capitalism drives people into heterosexual families: each generation comes of age having internalized a heterosexist model of intimacy and personal relationships" (p. 473). Bio-power as a contemporary method of disciplining queer identities is intended to uphold capitalism by coaxing our compliance if not with heterosexuality, with heterosexual ideals. *The L Word* is

exemplary of this on many levels. Not only does *The L Word* discipline compliance with the gender binary, it also participates in the romanticization of motherhood, the nuclear family, and upper middle-class lifestyles, albeit offering a slightly alternative version. The queer factor of *The L Word* is undermined by the predominance of gender conforming subjects who do not threaten the heterosexual order but rather restore it.

As an instrument of power intended to regulate the population through the diagnosis and management of deviance, GID realizes the second pole of development. By performing the ideology of GID, *The L Word* itself, in its choice of scenes and characters, becomes a tool of bio-power which we as viewers are active in. Watching these discourses performed on *The L Word*, our subjectivity is disciplined and constructed in the moment. The ideology of *The L Word* is discursively circulated and (re)produced, permeating the consciousness of those who have never even seen the series. The discourse achieves our compliance by making us *feel* a particular way. We are discursively instructed for example, that to avoid feeling shame, ostracism, pathologization, and terror we must fastidiously avoid identification with the butch lesbian. Conversely, positive self-worth, inclusivity, employment, and the ability to partake in the capitalist economy are the rewards of gender conformity. In other words, our bodies are made to want to comply.

Going to great lengths to repudiate the stereotypical working-class, bull dyke lesbian image, *The L Word* again employs a “reverse discourse” (Foucault, 180), aimed at redemption by making normal a new, modern day lesbian subject. This new and improved post-feminist, depoliticized lesbian, eschews masculinity in favour of beauty, femininity and high fashion. Sanitized of her past associations, she is far less threatening to male dominance and heterosexism and much more palatable for mass consumption. As the lone “lesbian” television show, we are

instructed not only that the refined lipstick lesbian is the preferred and rewarded homosexual, but is the quintessential lesbian, the “normal” homosexual. Our subjectivity and, in turn, relations of power are constructed in relation to our desire to identify with this lesbian.

The *DSM* and *The L Word* valorize gender conformity. Jenny’s adherence to femininity is both a reminder (should it be needed) of conventional norms and of the ways in which Moira transgresses these norms. Moira’s deviant gender presentation affirms and makes normal female femininity. As noted by Williamson (1986), “femininity needs the ‘other’ in order to function” (p. 105). Instructed as we are, to see Moira as differently gendered relative to Jenny and to the majority of women, we are persuaded to disassociate ourselves from the butch lesbian. By playing on the stereotypes which mark butch as undesirable and thus recognizable, femininity reaffirms its superior status, thus inducing our compliance.

Even those more masculine characters sometimes read as butch by lesbian viewers (for example Shane, Tasha, Joyce) are servile to normative standards of what it means to be female gendered. To recognize these characters as butch requires that one be “in the know.” In her article “Commodity Lesbian,” Danae Clark (1993) describes this strategy as “gay window dressing.” She describes how through the appropriation of queer cues, advertisers have capitalized on covert queer communication. Quoting the *New York Times*, Clark describes a dual marketing approach that will “speak to the homosexual consumer in a way that straight consumers will not notice” (Clark, 1993, p. 187). Similarly, characters such as Shane, Tasha and Joyce are constructed in such a way to be recognizable as butch to lesbian audiences, without risking the alienation of straight viewers.

The L Word performs both the rewards of gender conformity and the sanctions one can expect for defiance. Coaxing our compliance to take up our “appropriate” gendered subjectivity,

discourse constructs both who we are and who we are not. As Applebaum suggests (2009, italics in original),

At the same time that citation produces what is intelligible, it also constructs and forecloses what is unintelligible and, in doing so, excludes other types of bodies that do not matter – abject bodies. Subject status is constituted by violent exclusions – who we *are not* constitutes the contours of our identity as intelligible subjects (I am not *that*). Abject bodies are the ‘constitutive outside’ (p. 152).

Discursively (re)producing the long held assumption that butches secretly long to be men, *The L Word* and GID accomplish several ideological and bio-political functions. As discussed in my Data Analysis, the wrong body discourse is connected to and discursively upheld by long established claims to the naturalness, essentialness and duality of gender. Women are said, for example, to be naturally inclined to motherhood, while men have been constructed as more aggressive and rational. Even as I critically resist such claims, these discourses reinforce and reproduce the “naturalness” and “realness” I feel about my own gender identity. As conceived by bio-power, discourse and self-knowledge work together, circularly reproducing and solidifying common sense understandings of gender as inherent to who we are.

Negating the idea that femaleness can include traits and behaviours typically associated with men, the wrong body discourse reifies male masculinity as the real deal. The wrong body discourse implies a hierarchy of masculinity whereby authentic masculinity belongs to men and female masculinity is relegated to a debauched status, as not really masculinity (Halberstam, 1998). Viewed as bogus, masculinity performed on butch bodies is constituted as merely a frivolous parody. Moreover, it is implied that unlike female masculinity, male masculinity is not a performance at all.

Related to this is the notion that the butch body is inadequate. Bestowing men with authentic masculinity, elevates transsexual male masculinity to a superior subject position vis-à-vis butch. As Halberstam (1998) articulates, “As transsexual men become associated with real and desperate desires for reembodiment, so butch women become associated with a playful desire for masculinity and a casual form of gender deviance” (p. 143). Positioning butches as failed women and wannabe men, *The L Word* and GID cannot help but construct a subjective desire (particularly among younger butches) to conform to the gender binary. By employing heteronormative binary discourses that make unavoidable “a persistent discomfort with his or her sex” (APA, 2000, p. 581), *The L Word* cultivates internalized misogyny among gender dissidents. Moreover the wrong body discourse makes FTM transitioning appear as the natural answer, as it allows the butch to realize her *true* male self.

And if butches really do want to be men, what of the butches who consistently identify as female and/or never transition? It is suggested by some trans people that butch identified women are cowardly appeasing to gender rules, too afraid to *fully* claim their masculinity. For example, an FTM friend asked my partner when she was going to transition. Apparently unable to fathom that my partner is in fact quite comfortable with her female gender identity, the friend pushed further challenging “Come on. How often do you really feel like a girl (sic)?” As further examples will similarly reveal, within queer communities we are complicit in disciplining each other.

The current FTM trend occurring in queer North American communities can be attributed in part to the fact that medical technologies are now more widely available and accessible to those (butches) who were formerly denied gender reassignment. Certainly had they been available, many butches from generations past would likely have sought gender reassignment technologies.

I believe however, that advances in medical science are not the only reason that FTM transitioning is on the rise. As GLBT communities in North America gain increased legal rights and achieve what appears to be greater acceptance and “tolerance,” such acceptance is conditional. There remains an expectation to look and “act straight” or more precisely to compliantly fit into dominant White, middle-class, heteropatriarchy. *The L Word* and the *DSM* instruct that to enjoy the privileges associated with conformity we are to emulate the gender binary as much as possible. Those of us assigned female are ideally expected to emulate the lipstick lesbian. Regardless of gender assignment however, there are rewards for those able to successfully perform at either end of the gender binary. While *The L Word’s* Max still ran into trouble with narrow minded straight women (like his boss’ daughter) and later ended up pregnant, he was at the same time, able to avert many of the pitfalls Moira experienced. As a passing straight man, Max was able to reap some of the rewards of gender conformity and male privilege. He no longer had to experience a sense of dread every time he needed to use a public bathroom, he was able to earn a good income in a job of his choosing, and was generally afforded a degree of safety and respect that Moira was not. Whether specifically seeking it or not, perceived conformity grants a degree of privilege.

Among lesbians and FTMs who aim to radically contest the two tiered gender system and defiantly resist heterosexual and/or male identification, there also certain segments who are quite eager to be welcomed into the heteronormative paradigm. In reference to FTMs, Halberstam (1998) cautions, “Posttransition, we must remember at all times, many transsexual men become heterosexual men, living so-called normal lives, and for [some] folks, this is cause for celebration” (p. 158).

A “Toehold on Respectability”

The contemporary trend towards normalization within queer communities strikingly parallels the assimilationist aims of privileged White lesbians of the 1950s and sixties. In their adherence to gender conformity, high class fifties lesbians sought to distinguish themselves from second-rate working class butches and femmes. Like their younger sister, the trans man and the upwardly mobile lesbian of today aspires to the liberal notion that we are indeed “just like everybody else” and are therefore entitled to White, middle class privilege. Respectability however relies on disassociation from more degenerate lesbian subjectivities. Thus the butch lesbian, emblematic of working class and racialized bodies must be renounced as an unsavory relic of the past. Picking up again on Fellows and Razack’s (1998) feminist class and race analysis of women’s complicity in systems of domination – what they term a “toehold on respectability” – they examine class stratification among nineteenth century European women within the context of patriarchy and document women’s historical survival strategies in attaining respectability. Aiming to avoid stigmatization, middle-class White women sought a “toehold on respectability” by distinguishing themselves from the degeneracy ascribed to working class women, domestic workers and prostitutes. Analogous to the disavowal of butches by more privileged lesbians and some trans men, Fellows and Razack (1999) posit, “What she has invested was her own self, and her self depended in material and symbolic ways on disavowal of membership in other degenerate groups” (p. 15).

Our present “toehold on respectability” remains dependant on adherence to conventions of heteronormativity which are bound with class and race privilege. Binary conceptions of gender are strictest at the higher levels of class stratification. Both working class males and females are

considered acceptable in jeans and doing manual labour. However codes of dress and (until more recently) types of work are more segregated for upper class (predominantly White) people. Butch's degenerate position (as reflected in *The L Word*, and within real lesbian and mainstream communities), is precisely the result of both her masculine presentation and her historically lower social class status. Moreover, female masculinity and lower class status work together to discursively construct the butch as unattractive. By allowing only one butch identified character, (who then almost immediately transitions to become man) among a slew of ultra feminine women, *The L Word* disavows not only butch but working class culture.

The instructions of *The L Word* (bolstered by the *DSM*) appear to be two-fold: gender non-conformity causes unrelenting unhappiness (regardless of identity); thus, the closer one can replicate normative gender, the happier one will be. This message is discursively circulated and reproduced by both the dominant culture and by queers themselves. In her book, "Female Masculinity", Halberstam (1998) points to a "popular article" (p. 157) in *The New Yorker* in which reporter Amy Bloom interviews several transsexual men. "Bloom spends much time detailing the looks of the men she interviews" individually describing them as: "a handsome, shaggy graduating senior," "a not uncommon type of handsome, cocky, possibly gay man" with "a tight, perfect build" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 157). Surprised to find a bunch of "normal" guys, Bloom finds herself flirting with the men. Halberstam (1998) reiterates a scene in which Bloom describes sitting in a car with one of the respondents, Jim Green. Unable to find the dimmer switch for the headlights, her respondent successfully locates it for her. Bloom comments, "He looks at me exactly as my husband has on hundreds of occasions: affectionate, pleased, a little charmed by this blind spot of mine" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 157). Later sharing dinner with the same man, Bloom observes, "He does not say, 'Gee, this is a lot of food,' or anything like that.

Like a man, he just starts eating” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 157). Leaving no room for doubt, that the passing straight man is far preferred over the gender ambiguous butch, Bloom insidiously and tellingly concludes,

I expected to find psychologically disturbed, male-identified women so filled with self-loathing that it even spilled into their physical selves, leading them to self-mutilating, self-punishing surgery. Maybe I would meet some very butch lesbians in ties and jackets and chest binders, who could not, would not accept their female bodies. I didn’t meet these people. I met men. (Halberstam, 1998, p. 158).

Bloom’s comments suggest that unlike the “real” men she met, butches are pathologically scarred and severely disturbed individuals. She assumes that a female desire for male (assigned) clothing is indicative of not wanting to be female. This mind-set blatantly ignores that it is Bloom’s very way of thinking that constructs (at least in part) a desire to alter one’s body to appear more male. Simultaneously valorizing the gender conformity of these FTMs whilst demonizing and denigrating the gender subversive butch, Bloom’s comments discursively reproduce binary conceptions of gender.

Good Queers/Bad Queers

Through bio-power the temptation to constitute ourselves as “just like everybody else,” produces queer subjectivities that *self-discipline*, in other words bodies that want to comply. Similar to Razack and Fellows (1998) analyses of a “toe-hold of respectability”, Foucault’s concept of dividing practices speaks of the desire to differentiate ourselves from the “bad” and the “mad” (1982, cited in Chambon, 1999) through “technologies of the self” (1988, cited in Foote & Frank, 1999). As Foucault (1988, cited in Foote & Frank, 1999) explains,

Technologies of the self...permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immorality (p. 161).

Parallel examples of the impetus to distance trans and ultra feminine subjectivities from the butch lesbian are found respectively in Halberstam's (1998) aforementioned work which takes up some of the political implications of FTM transitioning and O'Sullivan's (1994) article, "Girls who kiss girls and who cares?", which critiques the function of the heteronormalizing lipstick lesbian. O'Sullivan (1994) references a quote by the British paper, the *Evening Standard*. Citing as evidence the positive, (apparently) new trend towards attractiveness and fun (read apoliticalness) among young, up and coming lesbians, the paper quotes one lesbian, who declares,

Women are no longer lesbians because they are feminists and man-hating. They are lesbians because that's their preference, and they no longer feel they have to dress in a frumpy way. What we're all saying is 'Ok, I'm a lesbian, I'm good looking and I'm going to have lots of fun' (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 90).

Similar to this woman's renunciation of the "man-hating" lesbian (a depiction previously noted as associated with butch), Halberstam (1998) points to online transsexual discussion forums where transsexual men instruct each other on how not to look butch. These instructions which recommend "dressing preppy as opposed to the standard jeans and a leather jacket look of the butch," (Halberstam, 1998, p. 156) avoiding certain haircuts and cultivating a conservative masculinity epitomize the intersections between social class, Whiteness and heteronormativity.

Moreover, as Halberstam (1998) emphasizes, “Most of these lists seem to place no particular political or even cultural value on the kinds of masculinity they mandate” (p. 157).

The pressure to conform at either end of the binary is also noted by butch performance artist Heather Cassils. In an interview with Noah Michelson (2010) of out.com, Cassils comments, “I’ve been in shoots before, and I’ve worked with other artists, and there’s this thing where they try to femme anybody up – especially when it’s mainstream media. And there’s this expectation that you’re going to fit on one end of the spectrum or the other... I feel there’s a lot of pressure, even in the queer world, to go trans or whatever and take these real extremes...”

Attending the Butch Conference (Butch Voices, 2010) in LA last fall, I encountered “dividing practices” or the willingness to trade a politics of difference for a “toehold on respectability” first hand. I participated in a discussion where butches and FTMs described painful workplace experiences of harassment and discrimination perpetrated mainly by men. It was extremely disheartening to have this discussion challenged by a White, passing trans man (who, not incidentally was wearing a three-piece suit). Standing to address the group, he charged that for the first time in his life, he felt “male bashed.” He went on to argue that, as someone employed by the school board he could understand why butches and some FTMs might cause (presumably straight) people to feel uncomfortable. Advancing classic conservative arguments about the need to protect children and families, he made a case for the importance of appearing respectable; essentially intimating that gender deviants should tone it down. This experience could be put down to an isolated example of extreme heteronormative conformity. However, my sense is that there are other trans men who share the view that the answer to bigotry is to look and act less queer. This attitude bares a striking resemblance to *The L Word* scene where Max, arguing

against making straight people feel uncomfortable, tries to dissuade Jenny from dancing in the fancy hotel bar with her ultra feminine girlfriend. It is a good example of the productive, repetitive nature of discourse in constituting subjectivity and, in this case a liberal discourse whereby the toleration of queer subjectivities is “inextricably linked to intolerance aimed at collectivities, their ways of life, their values, and above all, their value legitimating powers” (Bauman, 1991, cited in van Krieken, 2005, p. 41).

Unlike butch, both the lipstick lesbian and the transman have enjoyed an unprecedented level of conditional mainstream approval. Significantly, both of these subjectivities are more likely to be White and upwardly mobile. Moreover, Bloom’s descriptions of the passing, transsexual men she interviewed – “graduating senior,” and a “handsome...gay man” – (Halberstam, 1998, p. 157) are imbued with class bias. Paralleling the classism of Bloom’s redemption narrative, Ciasullo (2001) critiques contemporary mainstream magazines that concertedly distance the stylish new lipstick lesbian from the has-been butch dyke. Ciasullo (2001) quotes Inness (1997) who writes, “By emphasizing that lesbians are beautiful, well-dressed, and born to shop,...writers build up an image of lesbians as being ‘just like us’ – or, in other words, ‘homosexual = heterosexual’” (p. 593). Thus the acceptable queer subject is both irrevocably tied to consumption and consumable.

The New and Improved Consuming/Consumable Queer

As Case (1997) and Clark (1993) point out, increases in queer earning capacity have resulted in marketing strategies specifically tailored to the queer consumer. Queers are being marketed to as consumers like never before and some of us are celebratory. Building on the 1968 Virginia Slims ad which, appropriating feminist discourse, proudly announced to women “You’ve come a

long way baby”, some queers positively view our newly acquired promotion within the capitalist economy as symbolic of a new kind of liberation and acceptance. Comfortably positioned within the capitalist embrace, politics are viewed by many contemporary women as not only unnecessary but counter productive. Negatively associated with man hating, hairy legs and lesbianism, feminism is now frequently framed within dominant discourses as an oppressive barrier to full acceptance within dominant culture. Writing in 1994 and still relevant today O’Sullivan remarks, “Today the so-called loony, ugly (read not stereotypically feminine) lesbian, increasingly designated as an arbiter of rigid political correctness, remains a figure for derision and hatred, especially whenever the *politics* of feminism or lesbian feminism becomes a contentious issue in the larger society” (p. 79).

Free from political correctness and oppressive labels, style, beauty and wealth have conversely become discursively tied to emancipation and liberty; “a testament to the fact that identity is now a matter of personal choice rather than political compulsion” (Stein, 1992, p. 436). Pointing to Queer Nation’s production of the *Queer Shopping Network of New York* which markets queer commodities (what we in Vancouver call “Pride merchandise”), Case (1997) sarcastically remarks,

One might applaud such signs of commodification as signs of success. Good. We are not necessarily poor, nor downwardly mobile. Lipstick lesbians are cute. Sex can be fun. We are visible, strong, making more money, dressing better, eating out, and enjoying more sex (p. 213).

Queers are mistakenly being led to believe that such privileges indicate that a queer political agenda is no longer necessary. As Stein (1992) argues, “The market and its plastic pretensions have pervaded all corners of our lives, distorting our needs and shaping our desires” (p. 435).

The lure of shiny new objects and increased social acceptance is a distraction from the way in which marginalized subjects are increasingly being manipulated to conform to standards of White, middle-class, colonial, heteronormativity. Moreover, stripped of any political underpinnings the stylization of lesbianism “promotes a liberal discourse of choice that separates sexuality from politics and connects them both with consumerism” (Clark, 1993, p. 196).

Those who benefit however from an increase in social and economic wealth, (generally White, able-bodied, gender conforming people) do so at the expense of those subjectivities who do not conform to dominant standards of acceptability/respectability as those on the margins are measured against the “good” homosexual. Moreover, those of us (myself included) whose appearance conforms to the gender binary make it harder to be in the world for those who don’t. When conformity seeps in everywhere, colonizing even those bodies who once appeared gender queer, we are all held to a higher account of conformity.

In addition to opening up new markets for consumption, queer marketing strategies have the dual effect of producing queer bodies that are consumable. In their appropriation of lesbian culture, mainstream discourses reflect an “eating the Other” (hooks, 1992) kind of mentality. Hooks (1992) describes this process within the context of White supremacy as one in which practices of Whiteness commodify and consume racialized bodies while simultaneously reasserting dominance. She posits,

Currently, the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever differences the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization (hooks, 1992, p. 31).

Both Chamberland (1996) and Nestle (1992b) have alluded to straight society's long standing voyeuristic fascination to consume lesbians as a curio. It seems however that the heterosexist desire to possess lesbian subjectivity as an assertion of power and privilege has taken a new form, attempting to reconstitute the lesbian in its own heterosexual image. As Williamson (1986) astutely articulates,

The whole drive of our society is toward displaying as much difference as possible within it while eliminating where at all possible what is different from it: The supreme trip in a bourgeois ideology is to be able to produce its opposite out of its own hat (p. 100).

As lesbian history is erased and we are reappropriated as either heterosexual men or style conscious, stereotypically beautiful females, the heterosexual impulse to consume lesbian subjectivity, while bolstering hegemonic heterosexuality, appears omnipresent. At the same time however, the butch subject is made a non-subject. As Ciasullo (2001) explains, the butch body "cannot be 'de-lesbianized'" (p. 602) and thus consumable; "her body is already and always marked as lesbian..." (p. 602). Erasing the butch and replacing her with the untainted, repackaged, new and improved lesbian or queer subject, *The L Word* is exemplary in providing "sanitized yet attractive [lesbians/queers], clean of any (homo)sexual residue" (Ciasullo, 2001, p. 586) who are tailor-made for consumption.

Esteeming Butch

Though my intention has not been to argue against trans or uber feminine subjectivities, I am arguing for butch. Moreover, I am advocating that butch be recognized as a highly desirable and respected subject position in its own right. Part of this requires that butch not be conflated with trans as some gender theorists would have. Butch is related to trans in that both transgress

gender norms and both have been associated with mental illness. Prior to transitioning, many trans men identify as butch lesbians. For some however, butch is not just a step on the journey to trans, but a celebrated and valuable end point. It provides one more option on the gender spectrum and importantly, it broadens the spectrum for everybody. Unlike the wrong body discourse, butch is about culture not pathology. It is a culture that originated with and has belonged to women. It is part of women's history, one that celebrates difference, while embracing femaleness. As one dear butch friend explained it, "Butch is about pride in being a woman. Not a woman as most people understand it, but my own kind of woman. It is about not disavowing women." I fear that broader use of the term butch within a context where fewer lesbians claim butch will render invisible the historical association of butch with lesbianism, and thus contribute further to the disappearance.

I believe we need to raise awareness about the importance of butch within queer communities. Rather than conceiving of butches as in denial of their *true* selves or cowardly fence sitting, I am arguing just the opposite. Butches defiantly claim their masculinity in opposition to the terms which dictate gender normativity. Butches take masculinity out of the realm of men and significantly challenge the naturalness on which the gender binary is hinged. Just as butches of years past visibly declared their rejection of female subordination, feminine subservience and male dependency, today's butches continue to threaten heteropatriarchy by challenging male authority and making obvious their same-sex desire. Butch is a gender identity that offers the potential to transform masculinity and simultaneously affirm lesbian presence. Moreover, butch is a symbol of resistance for lesbian communities, one I believe is direly needed if we are to avoid appropriation and erasure. As O'Sullivan (1994) suggests, "Diversity, if it is devoid of any

serious notion of resistance, is a bit like rainbow ‘freedom rings’ – pretty and possibly signifying friendliness but nothing much else” (p. 93).

Conclusion

Queers should be highly suspect of any dominant cultural moves aimed to make us more acceptable. To lose butch is my view, to lose one of the few alternate roles models women have for performing our gender. Heteropatriarchy (and capitalism) rely on binary conceptions of gender to maintain the superiority of White men and heterosexuality. The medical establishment has a long history of disciplining the queer body to ensure the perpetuation of these systems. What may appear progressive on the surface is more likely contrived to control and regulate the queer subject. If we are to challenge the status quo we must be critically conscious of the choices we make and conscientious of whose interests they serve.

In particular, it is imperative that we be highly attuned to the impact of living in a women hating society. Misogyny is institutionally taught to us all. For those of us assigned female, it is impossible to not internalize it. With the assignment at birth of pink for girls and blue for boys, we immediately begin to be indoctrinated into extremely narrow prescriptions of gender. Dominant definitions of beauty are constructed by gender conformity, Whiteness, physical ability, class presentation, and heterosexism. Any of us who do not meet this standard of womanhood (which pretty much means the majority of us to varying degrees) are going to internalize some level of misogyny. Thus, few among us feel perfectly at home in our female bodies. In saying this, I do not mean to minimize the depth of discomfort that some trans people (and butches) feel about their bodies or to imply that self loathing is evenly distributed. Certainly society has more tolerance for women considered unattractive but feminine than it does

for masculine female bodies. Internalized misogyny however, has many manifestations. Masculine women are not the only women who experience profound self loathing. One need not look farther than for example, the high incidence of eating disorders among women and girls, the way in which women and girls are targets of the diet industry, or the increasing incidence of cosmetic surgery including labiaplasty. As I bemoan the recent new lines on my face and sagging skin, secretly noticing how I feel seduced by anti-aging advertisement and fantasize about face lifts, I am constantly reminded of the need to be critically conscious. As feminists, we absolutely need to question (but not necessarily abandon) any desires consistent with dominant teaching about proper femininity.

I am advocating that we need to interrogate gender and at the same time embrace it as something that is not only a product of dominant discourses but of subjugated discourses also. What I believe is needed is a huge expansion of what it means to be male or female. Masculinity as Halberstam (1998) argues at length, is not the property of men. Nor is femininity synonymous with women. What it means to be a woman, and conversely what it means to be a man, needs to be wide enough to encompass all of the various expressions of gender identity regardless of the body parts one has. Rather than attempting to nicely fit ourselves into the two available gender boxes, I am advocating for an assault on the meaning of “female” and “male.”

At the same time all of us deserve to live in the world with a degree of safety and comfort. We need to change the world, but we also need to be able to live in it. All choices are socially constructed; this is not a justification for denying trans people hormones or surgery.

Recognizing that our choices are socially constructed, queer communities need to work together as allies in the struggle against heteropatriarchal gender oppression. We need to be willing to challenge our own assumptions and possess a willingness to be respectfully challenged

by others. This does not entail policing each other, but it does require open dialogue. I am cognizant that any challenge to FTM trans may result in my being labeled transphobic. I also recognize that those of us who already face extreme criticism and discrimination from dominant groups run significant risks engaging in contentious issues from within. I believe strongly however, that a queer agenda concerned with broader aims of social justice must be willing to wrestle with how queer identities are constructed.

That there is evidence that dominant culture is targeting a disappearance of butch should be cause for alarm. The disappearance of butch is consistent with capitalist aims of personal autonomy, consumption, and commodification. Popular culture presents and promotes a very particular queer subject, one whose existence perpetuates rather than challenges heteropatriarchal power. While mainstream lesbian depictions are increasingly popular there is a scarcity of butch representation. As evidenced by *The L Word* and *GID*, those representations of butch that do exist, reflect and reproduce heteronormative discourses of deviance, pathology, and neo-liberalism. These discourses both disappear butch and construct subjectivity in accordance with binary conceptions of gender. While the power instilled in discourse is not absolute, we must not be seduced by the notion that with enough effort, we are free to be who we choose. As Sawicki (1991, cited in St. Pierre, 2000) points out, “Freedom does not basically lie in discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized and classified” (p. 492). Refusing to be subsumed and consumed by heteropatriarchy requires “ongoing resistance to how we are being constituted and are constituting ourselves as subjects” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492). Regardless of the identity labels taken up, as Halberstam (1998, 2005) points out, transforming the current sexual and gender hierarchy must be grounded in a politic that is feminist, anti-racist, and queer.

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