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**Queerer Than Thou: Representations and Receptions of Genders and Sexualities in
Showtime's *The L Word***

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I love the fact that Ilene does what she wants and doesn't bother giving in to critics' demands etc., whether the fan kind or otherwise. I think this is what has propelled the series to its successful status and has made it acceptable for it to deal with issues that most other series can't or don't get away with.

Bittersweet on OurChart.com

Do I think every character is representative of every lesbian that I know? Probably not, then most lesbians that I know work everyday, want a nice place to live, want a decent partner and just do about the same things that every heterosexual person does. This is a TV show. It's a soap opera, albeit a classy one. I, for one, will continue to watch, subscribe to Showtime, and post measured commentary on the site.

Filmlover on OurChart.com

I. Contexts

I would like to provide some context for this paper on *The L Word* from recent news stories which directly relate to American culture's continuing struggle with normative views of gender and sexuality. In February of 2007, Largo, Florida, city manager Steve Stanton, a 17-year veteran in his job was fired by a city council vote after coming out as a transgendered person. Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are not protected from employment discrimination at the national level or in the state of Florida. Less than one month after 72-year-old Andrew Anthos was brutally

beaten in Detroit for being gay, Ryan Skipper, a 25-year-old from Florida, was brutally murdered by two men who drove around town bragging that they had killed him for being homosexual. On the other hand, in Fresno, California, Cinthia Covarrubias became the first genderqueer student to run for Prom King with the support of the high school administration and many students. In the courses I teach on gender, even students from conservative backgrounds have warmly regarded the Native American culture's respect for people of the third gender, berdache, or "Two Spirit." Some students have even outspokenly wondered why American culture chooses to ostracize GLBTQI individuals who, if they had been part of some Native American cultures, might have been seen as sacred people. I share these stories to underscore the tangible importance of queer and gender studies and of a show like *The L Word*, whose impact cannot be felt without these contexts.

II. Problematic Representations

From the outset, when discussing the importance of lesbian representation, producers, actors, and writers involved in the production of *The L Word* have voiced a keen awareness of the possible impact of their labors. In an interview with *PlanetOut*, Ilene Chaiken, creator of *The L Word*, explains:

We've been so starved for representation—and yes, gay men have also been underrepresented, but it just doesn't begin to compare to the invisibility of lesbians in the world up until recently. I think the surge of responses has really been indicative of that.

Likewise, Jennifer Beals, who plays core character Bette Porter, invokes the young lesbian living in middle America, isolated from a GLBTQ community, and the ability of this show to provide reassurance:

It's incredibly exciting to me that some young woman, who's living in the middle of nowhere and having no access to this kind of community, will turn on the show and be able to relate to the characters and realize that she does have a place in the world—that there are other people like her and her

sexual orientation doesn't mean that she should feel as if she is less than. That's a huge reason that I took [the role]. (Warn)

When considering *The L Word's* impact on the lesbian community, one need only look as far as the numerous fan-established web sites, blogs, and message boards where topics including queer identity and representation are discussed by people from around the world, and often with great sophistication. Capitalizing on this wave of interest, Ilene Chaiken, Showtime, and several of the core cast members have launched OurChart.com, what they call "a social-networking site for lesbians and their friends." This site includes a Myspace-like web of interpersonal connections, as well as blogs and commentary from famous dykes and friends of dykes from Kate Clinton to Jane Lynch to Nancy Pelosi. Even more radical are the podcasts posted by Chaiken during which she explains her creative decisions behind each episode of Season Four immediately following their air dates, with each podcast garnering between 400 and 1,000 fan posts, many concerning queer identity and representation.

In spite of the self-consciousness with which the producers, writers, and actors have approached the making of *The L Word*, many fans are asking whether the show normalizes lesbians in service of heteronormativity, or whether it is truly queer. Due to its subject, it may seem self-evident that *The L Word* is queer. The assumed queerness is derived, of course, from the sexuality of the characters and is visible not only to a queer audience expecting representation of their queer lives, but also to straight audience members who are watching a show about lesbians, and expecting everything to be at least a little different, a little *queer*. However, numerous scholarly articles, blogs, and message board postings contest the show's queerness beyond the obvious sexuality of its characters. They decry its "lipstick" lesbians, pointing to a supposed reliance on the approbation of the male gaze or materialistic "Hollywood" commercialism. They also complain that its narrative is too dependent on the quest for monogamy and children, while others think the show slanders lesbians for not showing any couple actually sustaining monogamy. Before deciding, we must first ask what, besides the sexuality of

its characters, constitutes queerness in a show claiming to be representative of a particular queer group—of “The way that we live,” as the theme song states?

As has been discussed in other articles and by fans, the diversity of gender expressions and sexualities in *The L Word* amounts to tokenism and usually involves short-term appearances, especially since lesbian visibility is often interpreted as female masculinity, or the transgression of feminine gender norms. However, in West Hollywood where the show is set, visible gender transgressions are not as commonplace and some would say not as necessary in order for these individuals to secure themselves a place in a lesbian community. Lesbian gender expression in West Hollywood has different meanings and rationale from lesbian gender expression in Omaha, Nebraska or Brooklyn, New York. While we might prefer that *The L Word* be set in Omaha or Brooklyn, Ilene Chaiken explains the specificity of the show’s setting in an interview with *PlanetOut* soon after the show first aired:

I looked at the dynamics of the women I’ve known in L.A., and tried to cut a broad swath through that community. And I think that I look forward to getting beyond that community, too. Because our L.A. lesbian community is very specific—kind of anthropologically specific. But that’s where it begins for me—because those are my stories, and those are the ones I’m starting out telling.

Though by Season Four Chaiken has begun to tell some stories outside the immediate orbit of West Hollywood dyke culture, the show is still dominated by a high-gloss, high-femme, and high-fashion look. In the core cast, there are only two characters without the ability to pass as straight females: Shane, a thin soft butch who passed for a gay male when doing sex work, and Moira/Max, a transgendered person about whom a job interviewer exclaims, “You’re neither fish nor fowl” (3.5). Some critics and viewers decry this lack of diversity of markedly lesbian bodies. Others point to prominent books and articles which resituate the femme lesbian as a subversive figure or to the show as possibly the first primetime occasion when “gender outlaws” —

to use Kate Bornstein's term—such as Ivan, a drag king, Max, a transgendered character, and Lisa a lesbian-identified male, are given more than cursory development.

Representational tensions are explored throughout the four seasons of the show, mainly in metafictional narratives. The very notion of lesbian visibility takes on new meaning when considering that this is the first show portraying the lives of lesbians. These fictional lives are made visible through the medium of television, but this kind of visibility is of course fraught with representational issues common in popular culture, especially with programs set in the Los Angeles, the incubator of American popular culture. *The L Word* reminds the viewer that The Planet, the café where the characters socialize, is still in the same solar system, and some might say still influenced by the gravitational pull of the heteronormative paradigm which drives the market economy. Dana Fairbanks, a professional tennis player, is the only one in the group who is not an out lesbian. In the pilot episode, she rebukes Shane for her inability to pass as straight, i.e. as a so-called real woman and an “exist[ing]” and “intelligible” member of society (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23). Dana's assessment of Shane signals to the viewer that the others in the group *can* pass and be read as intelligible members of the dominant culture in terms of their gender performance, but not in terms of their desires. This distinction is important in the context of *The L Word's* varying reception by the lesbian community and critics who either demand more female masculinity or who appreciate the subversive style of the femme lesbian.

In this early scene with a closeted Dana, we're immediately reminded that in order for her to be able to represent companies and sell their products, she must still be “intelligible” as a real woman—someone whose natural sex is within certain boundaries described as female, whose gender performance is feminine according to cultural norms, and who, it is assumed, desires someone of the “opposite sex.” Similarly, Kate Bornstein describes the gendered messages sent by the market economy which serve to reify the binary and the heteronormative regulation of sex, gender and desire: “Every day I watched it, that television told me what was a man and what was woman. And every day I watched it, that television told me what to buy in order to be a woman”

(57). To take this discussion one step further, we might consider these questions: If Dana's character must present herself as a real woman in order to represent companies, does it not seem equally plausible that the women of *The L Word* also present themselves for the most part as real women, i.e. acceptably feminine, for the sake of representing a commodified lesbianism? Is *The L Word* still queer in spite of its high-femme characters and heterosexual actors? Is this show telling us what we must buy in order to be lesbian women? What is *The L Word's* attitude towards the commodification of lesbianism? This scene and others might be seen as the show's recognition of these tensions surrounding lesbian representation in consumer culture. Dana does finally get the Subaru account, in part due to the fact that she is a lesbian. The company's slogan for the advertisements in which she appears is "Get Out and Stay Out!" Metafictional / metacapitalist narratives like this one appear throughout the four seasons (I use the term "metacapitalist" alongside "metafictional" because unlike literary metafiction, the metafiction in this show directly and amply relates to the market).

Likewise, in Season Two, Mark's video diary seeks to represent the way lesbians live in "the anthropological sense" as he describes. He secretly places concealed video cameras throughout the house he shares with Shane and Jenny to achieve this authenticity. Of course, the viewer knows that this so-called authenticity is at the expense of Jenny and Shane's privacy and that it is staged—in one scene Mark hires a young woman to pose as a flower delivery girl for Shane to bed in front of the newly-installed cameras. The staged quality of many of the scenes in Mark's project as well as the ultra-spliced excerpt Mark shows to his boss call to mind the claims to authenticity of *The L Word* and its ultimate artificiality as a television show. Mark's boss complains that there's not enough sex and that there's too much talking. Some fans of *The L Word* say the same thing or the reverse about the show, depending on their representational views.

Metafictional narratives abound surrounding the character of Jenny, who is a writer. In Season Four, she writes a book entitled *Lez Girls*, an excerpt of which is published in *The New Yorker*. Like most metafictional narratives, the layering in this

storyline is rich for interpretation. Notions of integrity, authenticity and the text's relationship to its audience are problematized by the fact that the story Jenny is writing is the same story which viewers of *The L Word* are seeing. Throughout the season, we see characters on the show struggle with Jenny's portrayal in her novel of characters whose stories and names mirror their own. Jenny's book is optioned for a film and Tina, now a film executive, talks to her in terms of lesbian representation, explaining that her film studio would be "committed to the integrity of the project," by which she means committed to depict lesbians as they (supposedly) are without exploiting them. In these same scenes, Tina invokes the Midwestern lesbian who needs to "see herself" onscreen to feel better, which finally convinces Jenny to allow her book to be made into a film. All of these concerns mirror those occasioned by *The L Word* as a show claiming to represent lesbians. It is clear that the show's attitude toward Jenny is one of humorous contempt. Her scenes play with clichés that are "very L.A." She purchases a Pomeranian to carry under her arm, prances around with an enormous designer handbag (for which there was a waiting list), orders complex coffee concoctions, and solicits and responds shallowly or vehemently to flattery. It is clear that Jenny's storyline in Season Four is meant to be seen as Hollywood self-mockery, made possible by the show's setting in West Hollywood. In spite of the humorous tone of this particular storyline, it is still important to note that overall tensions surrounding representation are repeatedly explored metafictionally in *The L Word*, and that these storylines directly indicate an awareness of some of the criticism Ilene Chaiken has received.

III. Queer as Norm?

Using the work of Judith Butler and Kate Bornstein, I argue that *The L Word* is indeed queer, to such an extent that a normative queer space is created. The lives of the core characters routinely transgress the naturalized heteronormative views of sex, gender, and desire; when essentialist or limiting notions of these three areas arise, the characters work to maintain a queer space. In the queer space of *The L Word*,

transgression means going against assumed and maintained queerness. In other words, one transgresses the queer norm when one regulates gender and sexuality according to the heteronormative, misogynist model. This queer norm does not exist so much *because* it *opposes* the heteronormative model; instead, it exists as an ongoing renegotiation of queerness, which is itself in a state of flux.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler explains that to transgress the acceptable gender performances sanctioned by culture's reverence for the binary is to transgress both sex and desire, since in the heteronormative model, sex is naturalized and one's performance of gender must and should naturally correspond to one's "natural" sex. She states, "The cultural matrix through which gender identity becomes intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (23-24). As Butler explains, one must desire someone of the "opposite sex" in order to be a so-called real man or a real woman, and thus to be a "culturally intelligible [...] person" (23). She explains that, "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (23). Furthermore, to be someone who transgresses any of these categories as an intersex, genderqueer/transgender, bisexual, or homosexual individual, is to call into question the whole naturalized system of relations upon which the individuals of the dominant culture base their identities, relationships, and economy and through which "persons are defined" (23). Thus, in transgressing sex, gender, or the appropriate direction for one's desire, one makes oneself a target for ridicule, social and economic isolation, and violence because one is asserting oneself as a human, who, according to the norm, cannot and should not exist.

To begin, *The Planet*, the show's central café and physical manifestation of queer space, is not a lesbian-oriented Starbucks-like franchise located across the U.S. It is, instead, *its own planet*. Though this queer space still has to confront the dominant culture's attempts at limiting the "livability," of the characters' lives, as Butler describes

in *Undoing Gender*, these scenarios are rendered even more absurd by the lack of visibility of the dominant culture for most of the show, which instead focuses on “the way that we live” within a visible, particular lesbian community. Indeed, *The L Word* obfuscates members of the dominant culture in much the same way that other television shows obfuscate queers. Thus, while other television shows have disparaged queer life by isolating it and juxtaposing it against a monolithic heterosexist paradigm, *The L Word* exposes the absurdity of these dictates of the dominant culture when faced with pervasive queer contexts.

As early as the pilot episode, the relationships between biological capability, sex, and gender are immediately undermined and queered in the scenes detailing Bette and Tina’s insemination appointment. Upon viewing the donor’s sperm under the microscope, the doctor indicates that “This stuff won’t get anyone pregnant.” Since Bette and Tina are both female, they need a sperm donor in order to have a child; however, *The L Word* underlines the fact that not all males are up to the task. In her book *Sexing the Body*, Anne Fausto-Sterling has explored biology’s tendency to inscribe sex and thus gender on the body, an inscription whose end meaning *The L Word* immediately calls into question with the donor’s “lackluster” sperm. Which begs the question, are Bette and Tina not a real couple because they cannot biologically produce a child together? Due to *The L Word*’s positioning of the infertile male in this starting-a-family narrative (which dominates most of the first season stories for Bette and Tina), to answer yes to this question would also require the viewer to similarly respond that the donor is not a real male for the same reason. This argument is taken further when Tina tells Alice and Dana about the problems with the donor’s sperm, to which Alice retorts, “You would never know by the way he fucks!” We are reminded again that biology does not signify sexual practice or aptitude, or, the object of desire, as Dana and Alice’s conversation indicates.

These examples show how *The L Word* makes queerness the norm, a norm constantly transforming itself through surprise and an opening of hitherto seemingly airtight categories. We see the results of a character’s transgression of the queer space in

the pilot episode. Dana, Shane, and Alice are having a conversation at The Planet concerning Tina and Bette's need for a new donor:

Marina: He has to be healthy, strong, creative, handsome, artistic.

Dana: Well there's always Shane. [Turning to address Shane who has just entered.] You know, do you have to dress like that all the time? Well, I wouldn't be seen on the street with you. Everything about the way you're dressed like screams dyke.

Alice: God, Dana.

Shane: Sorry, man.

Dana: Look, if I'm out, I'm screwed. Sponsors are exactly clamoring to have their stuff repped by big old lezzie tennis players.

Shane: No, it's cool. I totally dig your need to make a living. Anyway, I've got to meet a client. [Exit Shane.]

Alice: You know you are going to pickle in that self-loathing homophobia.

Dana: You are going to shrivel in that self-righteous priggishness.

Dana's final quip adds one more dimension to this conversation, calling to mind the conflict which arises between out lesbians who demand that others do the same and those who are still in the closet out of fear of reprisal from the dominant culture. However, in this scene, Alice reminds Dana that to not accept the gender expression of another lesbian is to, in fact, express hate for herself and her own desires. Thus, the viewer increasingly discovers that *The L Word*, while not entirely free of heteronormative or essentializing assumptions, creates a safe space for the "discontinuities" and "transformations" of sex, gender, and desire of which Butler and Bornstein speak. *The L Word* continually allows for this kind of tension surrounding gender identity and expression, and does not support regulating lesbian gender and sexual identity in the same shaming and violent manner as the dominant culture. In the end, *The L Word* sends the queerest of messages: be nice and do not essentialize. Characters who fail in this area at various moments are the ones who are lovingly and sometimes playfully "regulated," not the other way around.

Some of the queerest moments in the show involve the discontinuity-enhancing dildo (or, as some would say, the phallus). Many forests have been turned to paper to discuss women's apparent "lack" and/or their desire to "become" the phallus (while never being capable of "having" it) and for feminist theorists to retool or in some cases debunk this totalizing, androcentric mythology. In a similar manner, *The L Word* makes it patently clear that in a queer space, the dildo takes on different meanings in different contexts (most, if not all, unrelated to the concept of "lack" or even of "the phallus"), and the show attempts to educate the viewer concerning those contexts and meanings. In Season Two, Shane and Jenny verbally establish for their straight roommate, Mark, that lesbian fucking is "entirely possible" (2.5). At this point in the show's progression, with one exception to be explained later, the viewer has not encountered a dildo or a vibrator. Instead, the viewer concludes in more than one scene that manual stimulation and penetration is occurring. Thus, the viewer understands that "fucking" does not necessitate a penis or a phallus, thereby dissipating Mark's (and no doubt, some viewers') problems conceptualizing "lesbian fucking." Once this education has occurred, *The L Word* is able to queer the phallus, or, in other words, to offer a glimpse of the meanings of the dildo in a queer space.

In Season One (1.5), Alice begins dating Lisa, a lesbian-identified man. When they are having sex, Lisa procures a dildo (1.8). Alice insists that he should use his penis instead.

Lisa: Wait, I have something. [Opening a zippered bag and taking out a purple dildo. Stroking her chest with it.]

Alice: You're kidding, right?

Lisa: Why would I be kidding?

Alice: Well, because you're a man, you know, you've got the real thing.

Lisa: That's not how I want to make love to you.

Alice: That's how I want you to, okay.

Lisa: But it goes against who I am.

Alice: Listen, you're a man. You're a man named Lisa, but you're definitely a man.

Lisa: I'm a lesbian... man.

Post-coitus, Alice is visibly and verbally pleased, while Lisa draws back silently and appears hurt, even violated. This scene has been a cause for confusion when it comes to interpreting *The L Word's* queer politics. To me, it seems that Lisa supports the argument that the dildo is not a phallus or a stand-in for a penis. He wants to make love to Alice as himself, a lesbian (-identified man). When Alice insists that he use his penis rather than the dildo, he is hurt and confused. For Lisa, the two objects are not equivalents. In Lisa's lesbianism, the dildo does not symbolize an absent penis that once present, need not be substituted for. Ultimately, Alice rejects Lisa's gender expression.

Season Three shows several dildos in different contexts and with different attendant meanings. Fan blogs and message board postings have had mixed reviews of this development in the portrayal of sex, reflecting many of the possible symbolic meanings of the dildo. I would argue that in *The L Word*, the dildo is able to remain queer, opposing heteronormative contexts rather than being subsumed by them due to the inundation and nature of sex involving dildos in Season Three. For example, Moira/Max, the transgendered girlfriend of Jenny binds his breasts and "packs" a dildo in a harness. In "Lifesize" (3.6), Billie notices Max's "package," saying, "Nice start, Max." Fellatio follows, with Billie performing. Jenny, Max's girlfriend enters.

Max: Jenny, um, we were just, ugh. [Zipping up.]

Jenny: Is this the kind of relationship you want? Because if it is...

Billie: Jenny, Max is...

Jenny: Shut up.

Max: It's just he made me feel like a real guy, you know. I wasn't just like some girl with this thing in her pants. [Jenny seems to be considering this statement.]

Jenny: Okay. [Max smiles.] It's okay. [Jenny puts her hands behind Max's neck, looks into his eyes.] Don't hide. [Max nods.] Okay, let's go. [Max exits, Jenny stops and gives Billie a stare.]

Max's experience as a transgendered person has been until this point understood to be a matter of gender identity (which is more palatable for the viewer as it is more

easily explained and pathologized). Viewers have understood Max to be a woman “in a man’s body” who desires women. We have already seen him use a strap-on with a woman (Jenny) and refuse to allow her to penetrate him. However, after the scene with Billie, Max’s gender expression and sexuality are queered further, and the audience is again reminded that gender does not correspond to naturalized conceptions of sex, and desire does not follow from gender. Furthermore, in the next episode, “Lonestar,” Max performs anal sex with his strap-on dildo with Billie, who happens to have a condom and a bottle of lube in his pocket. Once again, the conceptual problems a heterosexual viewer might have once had regarding queer sex are dispelled.

In “Lifeline” (3.5), Shane has sex with Cherie Jaffey (who has just gotten a divorce) in the missionary position after arriving at her house wearing a strap-on dildo in a leather harness under her clothes. At the same time, Tina (who prior to Bette and Helena had only dated men) begins dating a man. The viewer’s initial assumption that Tina wants “what she can’t have” in a lesbian relationship is undermined by the sheer number of potential queer phalluses in Season Three. The scene where Tina confesses to Bette that she “has these feelings” towards men is juxtaposed with the scene showing Shane and Cherie, which so clearly queers the viewers’ perception of the missionary position, with Shane’s androgynous back and buttocks and obvious breasts hovering over and thrusting her strap-on into the newly-divorced Cherie. Rebecca Beirne sums up other critics’ fears that the characters’ predominantly femme gender expressions coupled with the supposed heterosexuality of most of the actors translates into a belief that the characters are really heterosexual, or could easily be converted to heterosexuality. However, as has been shown, the doubling of straight desire and femme gender expression with queer sexual practices (which for some, could be queerly reminiscent of straight sex) serve to demolish any belief the viewer might have that any of the characters, even Tina, are “really” straight. Throughout *The L Word*, the meanings of the penis/phallus and the dildo are continually blurred and renegotiated, just as they are in the queer community and, increasingly, in the dominant culture. Thus, upon

closer examination, *The L Word* queers traditional notions of lesbian sexual practice, heterosexual desire, and femme gender expression.

While Jenny's acceptance of Max's encounter with Billie is a good example of the plot supporting the idea of a queer norm in flux, some of the time *The L Word* maintains this queer space through quotable sound bytes. For example, Shane gently regulates the group for criticizing Jenny for her seeming return to the gender binary in her relationship with Max (3.5): "You know what, what difference does it make whether someone is butch or femme? We should just leave labels alone and just let people be who they are." In Season One (1.3), Shane explains: "Sexuality is fluid. Whether you're gay, or you're straight or you're bisexual, you just go with the flow." Similarly, in "Lesson Number One" (4.7), Papi scolds Alice for not accepting Tina's bisexuality: "We fight our whole lives to not be judged by who we sleep with, and that is exactly what you guys are doing to Tina."

Heteronormative notions of kinship are also queered in *The L Word*. Throughout the series, Alice keeps a chart depicting the sexual connections among numerous different women. She eventually must shift this chart from a dry erase board in her apartment into cyberspace. This chart serves as the "motherboard" of this community, a community which is not marked by the same norms of possessiveness as seen among heterosexuals. For example, sleeping with your best friend's ex is not taboo. In fact, in *The L Word*, there are major sexual and romantic connections among the core characters, which serve to form a tighter bond among these intimate friends rather than cause jealousy. Alice describes The Chart to the editor at the magazine she writes for, hoping he'll agree to allow her to do a piece on interconnectivity and The Chart (1.3):

It's not just about lesbians [...] The point is we're all connected, you see. Through love, through loneliness, through one tiny, lamentable lapse in judgement. All of us, in our isolation, reach out from the darkness, from the alienation of modern life to form these connections. I think it's a really profound statement about the nature of human existence.

In this scene, we are shown that human kinship borne of sex is not merely familial, matrimonial, and reproductive, and Alice seems to indicate that once visible, these connections lead us to what Butler describes in *Undoing Gender*: “sexuality outside the field of monogamy may well open us to a different sense of community, intensifying the question of where one finds enduring ties” (26).

These “enduring ties,” unreliant on the heteronormative, reproductive model, are seen again in the scene that immediately follows Tina giving birth to her and Bette’s daughter, Angelica. All of the intimate friends who make up the core cast are present, and they pass the baby from person to person, each one looking into the baby’s eyes. This scene clearly queers the usual post-birth scene with parents and grandparents and “Oh, she looks like you” comments. With Tina in a separate recovery room after a difficult birth, there is, in fact, not one “blood relative” of this newborn in the room. The queering of normative kinship is made even more apparent when Kit, Bette’s sister, comments: “Hey Angelica, you’re going to have a very very interesting life because we are some very very interesting people.” Bette adds, speaking through tears, “This is your family.”

Though its representation of diversities may be problematic, *The L Word* does still seem to advocate for a queer space open to greater possibilities for the performance of sex, gender, and desire, and thus for the human. Butler explains, “The human is not captured once and for all. That the category is crafted in time, and that it works through excluding a wide range of minorities means that its rearticulation will begin precisely at the point where the excluded speak to and from such a category” (*Undoing Gender* 13). This “rearticulation” is perhaps most poignantly felt in Season Three during Dana’s funeral. The pastor attempts to erase her sexuality, saying, “She would have settled down, with a loving partner, someone to care for her, a strong, devoted man, a loving husband who could match her strength.” Alice interjects, standing up and yelling, “What are you talking about? Dana was gay.”

This scene is a demonstration of “the point where the excluded speak.” Its impact is derived from its participation in a show which is solely *about* lesbians, and

from the fact that this scene is one of the few in *The L Word* where lesbians are the sexual *minority*. Importantly, this scene is not occurring on a daytime television show where the kind of statement Alice makes would be used to deride the deceased or to shock the audience. Instead, in this queer context, the audience finally hears these queer characters speaking as characters, not as Others. For all its representational tensions, *The L Word* is “rearticulat[ing]” personhood in the face of the dominant culture’s exclusionary and violent regulation of what is considered legally and socially human.

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