

University College London, Institute of Education

MA Digital Media, Culture and Education

**Gender and Identity: An Analysis of Transgender Film
Representation *The Danish Girl* (2015)**

Summer 2018

I confirm that I have read and understood the Institute's Code on Citing Sources and Avoidance of Plagiarism.

I confirm that this assignment is all my own work and conforms to this Code.

This dissertation may not be made available to the general public for borrowing, photocopying or consultation without the prior consent of the author.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	5
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE FILM <i>THE DANISH GIRL</i>	8
1.2 THE CONFUSING STATE OF IDENTIFICATION: WHAT SHOULD WE CALL LILI – THE USAGE OF NAMES AND PRONOUNS	12
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 QUEER REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA	14
2.1.1 <i>Overview of Representations of Transgendered People in Films and TV Shows</i>	15
2.1.2 <i>Presenting Difference: Transgender Representations in Films and TV Shows</i>	17
2.1.3 <i>Distorted Transgendered Representations</i>	18
2.1.4 <i>Accepting Differences on Screen</i>	21
2.2 NORMALISING QUEER/LGBTQ+ IN TELEVISION AND FILMS: ‘REAPPROPRIATING’ QUEER	24
3. METHOD	29
4. DISCUSSION	31
4.1 REPRESENTATION OF <i>THE DANISH GIRL</i>	31
4.1.1 <i>Discourse and Power</i>	33
4.1.2 <i>In Between of Heterosexual Normative discourse and Queer Discourse – the Struggle of Lili/Einar</i>	34
4.1.3 <i>The Gaze of the Dominated Group: Male Gaze and Patriarchy</i>	37
4.1.5 <i>Within the Heterosexual Normative Discourse: Medical Discourse</i>	42
4.1.6 <i>The Unconventional Representation of Gender Roles</i>	45
4.2 IDENTITY	47
4.2.1 <i>Identity is Fluid</i>	48
4.2.2 <i>Reconstructing an Identity on the bases of Previous Identity/ies</i>	49
4.2.3 <i>Excluding Einar and Reinventing Lili</i>	51
4.3 GENDER THEORY IN EXPLAINING LILI’S GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY	55
4.3.1 <i>How Sex, Gender and Sexuality are Perceived within the ‘Heterosexual Matrix’</i>	57

4.3.3 <i>The Fundamental Idea of Queer Theory: Butler’s Way of seeing Body, Gender and Sexuality</i>	62
4.3.4 <i>The Expression of Gender: Gendered Objects for Certain Gender</i>	66
4.3.5 <i>Performative gender: the expression of feminine gestures and movements</i>	67
4.3.6 <i>Subversion of Gender</i>	72
5. CONCLUSION	73
REFERENCES	75

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: EINAR LEARNING TO WALK IN HIGH HEEL SHOES TO ATTEND THE ARTISTS' BALL AS LILI ...	11
FIGURE 2: EINAR MIMICKING THE MOVEMENT AND GESTURES OF A PEEP SHOW PERFORMER	11
FIGURE 3: LILI'S SCARF BLOWN AWAY BY THE WIND.....	16
FIGURE 4: GERDA SMILING AFTER SEEING THE SCARF FLY AWAY KNOWING THAT LILI IS FREE NOW	17
FIGURE 5: EINAR REFUSED TO PUT ON ULLA'S DRESS	35
FIGURE 6: EINAR FEELS PHYSICAL PAIN AFTER TALKING ABOUT SHARING A KISS WITH HANS AXGIL AS LILI WHEN HE WAS A BOY BACK IN HIS HOMETOWN	36
FIGURE 7: THE FIRST DOCTOR THEY SEE DIAGNOSES THE ILLNESS AS BEING CAUSED BY CHEMICAL IMBALANCE WHICH COULD BE TREATED WITH RADIATION	43
FIGURE 8: DIAGNOSIS OF CHEMICAL IMBALANCE	43
FIGURE 9: GERDA AS THE STRONG DOMINANT PARTY IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP.....	47
FIGURE 10: GERDA TOUCHED LILI'S HAND BUT AFTERWARDS LILI TOOK HER HAND BACK.....	53
FIGURE 11: LILI FLIRTING WITH HANS	55
FIGURE 12: LILI'S VISIT TO HENRIK'S HOUSE	55
FIGURE 14: HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX – SEX, GENDER AND SEXUALITY	58
FIGURE 15: BUTLER'S WAY OF INTERPRETING BODY, GENDER AND SEXUALITY	63
FIGURE 16: PERFORMING EINAR.....	68
FIGURE 17: EINAR GOES TO SEE A PEEP SHOW TO MIRROR THE MOVEMENTS OF THE PERFORMER	69
FIGURE 18: GERDA TEACHING EINAR HOW TO WALK LIKE A WOMAN	69
FIGURE 19: EINAR OBSERVING AND MIMICKING A WOMAN'S HAND GESTURE AT A FISH MARKET WHILE GERDA IS LOOKING AT EINAR IN THE BACK.....	70
FIGURE 20: LILI (STILL IDENTIFIED AS EINAR AT THE TIME) PRACTICING TO WALK IN HIGH HEEL SHOES FOR LILI'S FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE AT THE ARTISTS' BALL	70
FIGURE 21: AT THE ARTISTS' BALL, LILI OBSERVING AND LEARNING THE BEHAVIOUR OF WOMAN WHILE SITTING BY THE DANCE FLOOR.....	71

ABSTRACT

Media representations of transgenderism have not always been fair or unbiased. *The Danish Girl* (2013) has presented the audiences with a complex transgendered protagonist fighting against the heterosexual normative discourse. This paper aims to investigate the identity and gender issues in the film *The Danish Girl* (2013). To unveil the gender and identity issues in this film, the author has applied discourse analysis to the literal texts and visual texts in the film. This paper found that heterosexual normative discourse has a significant impact on different groups of representations in the film. This discourse has been heavily embedded in their thoughts and ways of living. Moreover, even though the protagonist is fighting against the heterosexual normative discourse, she still fails to be completely free from the impact of the said discourse. *The Danish Girl* is a highly praised film representation that portrays the conflicts and problems between heterosexual normative discourse and queer discourse. This research is thus helpful for media content makers who would like to ensure more nuanced and non-stereotypical representations of queerness that might possibly have an impact on their viewers.

Keywords: representation, heterosexual normative discourse, queer discourse, gender, identity, film, transgender

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the representation of transgendered people in films and television shows. In it, I focus on one romantic-drama film made in 2015, *The Danish Girl*. The film is about a biologically-born man, Einar Wegner, first discovering then developing and constructing her identity as Lili Elbe.

This study aims to uncover the complexity of Lili Elbe/Einar Wegner's identity. At the same time, I aim to look into how gender is represented in the film by analysing and interpreting meanings with discourse analysis. In addition to that, I will also investigate how the heterosexual normative discourse and queer discourse interact with each other in the film - which held more power and who represents them? To achieve these aims, I will conduct close analysis as an audience analyst by selecting a few scenes in the film *The Danish Girl* (2015) whilst employing theories in the field of representation, identity and gender. This aim is important because *The Danish Girl* was an influential piece of work and the film has been well-recognised in the whole world. It is not only appraised by film critiques but also enjoyed by the mass audiences all around the world. Media plays a crucial role in representing LGBTQ+ people. Gaunlett concludes:

Lesbian, gay, and transgendered people are still under-represented in much of the mainstream media, but things are slowly changing. In particular, television is offering prime-time audiences the chance to 'get to know' nice lesbian and gay characters in soap operas, drama series, and sitcoms. But, to be honest, not that many of them. Tolerance of sexual diversity is slowly growing in society, and by bringing into people's home images of sexual identities which they might not be familiar with, the media can play a role in making the population more – or less – comfortable with these ways of living (Gaunlett, 2008, p.286).

The Danish Girl was nominated for 4 Academy Awards in 2015 and won in one category (Best Supporting Actress - Alicia Vikander). Secondly, according to *Box Office Mojo*, it achieved box office success of \$ 64 million dollars in worldwide gross.

Both achievements are an indication of the film reaching a fairly large number of viewers. Hence, the film might to some extent have had some impact on its viewers' attitude of transgenderism. Another reason why I have placed an emphasis on the ticket sales and 'mainstream appeal' is that mainstream films are usually made by huge film production companies. These companies have bigger budgets and more resources. These kind of films would normally reach more viewers hence more influential. Perhaps all these non-heterosexual normative representations included in mainstream films such as *The Danish Girl* could serve as one means to challenge and overthrow the stereotypical culture of 'gender' norms.

Furthermore, this study also aims to uncover the complexity of the protagonist Einar Wegner/Lili Elbe's identity. While achieving this, analysis of *The Danish Girl* would navigate through representation theory, identity theory and gender (queer) theory.

Although the three sections are divided into individual sections, they are linked to one another therefore it is likely that all these theories would be discussed upon in relation. In the representation section, I will be drawing on theories of representation (Hall, 2013; Foucault, 1977) whilst analysing how the characters in the film, including the main character, have been affected by the dominant discourse. In addition, I will also look into how the dominant heteronormative discourse hegemonises and isolates queer discourse in the film. Most importantly, I will examine how this dominant discourse has come to manipulate the reconstruction of Lili's gender identity.

Interestingly, the filmmakers of *The Danish Girl* presents some of the people who represented the dominant heterosexual discourse as unlikable bullies. Later in the thesis in the identity section, I will discuss the possible influences of Lili's and the other film characters' 'socially constructed' identities (Butler, 2007). Does this

representation of people of marginalised sexual orientation help the cause of subverting and causing normative ‘gender trouble’ (ibid)? What sort of ideas does the dominant heteronormative discourse enable, constrain and constitute (Storey, 2015)?

I will then carry the discussion forward to discuss transgender identity in this film. After this section, the discussion will move on to the theory of gender, especially in terms of how gender is learned but not something people are born to acquire (Butler, 2007).

1.1 Background information of the film *The Danish Girl*

The Danish Girl (2015) is a British romance drama film directed by British filmmaker Tom Hooper. It stars Eddie Redmayne (as Lili Elbe and Einar Wegner) and Alicia Vikander (as Gerda Wegner). The film is based on the novel of the same title by David Ebershoff. The story takes place in Copenhagen, Denmark. The story is set in a time period when a well-established and successful painter, Einar Wegner, who was born biologically as a male later discovers “her” female identity as Lili Elbe.

One significant part in the film is how Lili struggles with her own identity and how other people react to her transgenderism. The film shows that where most people were heavily influenced by the heterosexual normative discourse, transgenderism would be seen as abnormal. As transgenderism is outside of the ‘heterosexual matrix’, Lili has to face challenges and judgements from people upholding heterosexual discourse (Butler, 2007). These people include some medical professionals, Gerda (Lili’s marital spouse) early in the film and Lili herself.

Lili then decides to be the first person in the world to undergo two sex reassignment surgeries in the film. The first one is to remove the male external genitalia. The second one is to construct a female genitalia, or in Professor Wanerkros's (the doctor who performed the surgeries in the film) words, 'to construct a vagina'.

Lili's quest to seek self-expression of her identity is accompanied and *later* supported by her marital spouse Gerda Wegner. Gerda is not supportive of her crossdressing and pursuit of becoming a woman throughout the whole experience, but she later comes to believe that her husband is a woman. Lili's view on her change in identity is in no doubt one of the focus point of the film. In other words, the film focuses on presenting how Lili's view on transgenderism has changed over her pursuit of becoming a woman. Simultaneously, it is also interesting to look into Gerda's change in her belief system as Lili's gender identity progresses.

The film explicitly portrays Lili's desire, struggle and determination to become a woman. In the early stages of her transition, the filmmakers showed how Lili has observed and then learned to become a woman by highlighting her mimicking the gestures and movements of women. Judith Butler (2007) suggests that gender is a socially constructed concept that it is learned rather than something we are born with. Indeed, in the film as well as society, men and women are expected to behave differently.

An example could be given as such: Lili (at that time, she was still Einar) did not enjoy going to parties whereas Gerda enjoyed going with her partner. As a result, Gerda suggests Lili attend the Artists' Ball with her instead of Einar. The two then started preparing for the event by dressing up and learning to behave like a woman. This was the first time that Einar was trained to learn the expressions of performing to be a woman. Butler (2007) also states that our perspective on gender tends to

‘presuppose and pre-empt the possibilities of imaginable and realisable gender configurations within culture’.

That is to say, we regard gender within cultural regulations and constraints.

Therefore, before Lili showed herself in public, she had to learn the way of appropriate manners. Luckily, even though for Lili attending the Artists’ Ball was her first time showing herself in a public setting, she had been in many social settings like that one as Einar. As a result, Lili would only need to learn how a ‘woman’ behaves in these settings and in general. Butler (ibid, p.25) wrote, ‘there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’.

Another important idea that was brought up by Butler about gender is that it is a performance (Butler, ibid). At first, it was Gerda who ‘taught’ Einar how to ‘act’ like a woman. The training includes walking in high heel shoes (See Figure 1), applying makeup and learning the hand gestures of a woman. In Figure 1, Einar stumbles and nearly trip on his way to the chair, it showed that it takes practise to learn how to behave like a woman.

Hence, the filmmakers present the audiences with Einar mimics other women’s gesture in several different settings in the name of showing all the effort Lili puts into performing her female gender. For example, when Lili (as Einar) goes to a peep show, she goes there not for the purpose of enjoying the erotic performance. Instead, she is there to learn and to mirror the movements of the female erotic performer.

When she mimics the movements of the performer, she seems to enjoy it. The film thus presents the possibility that for her, it is a sort of satisfaction in feeling that she is more like a woman by moving her body in such ‘feminine’ way (See Figure 2).



Figure 1: Einar learning to walk in high heel shoes to attend the Artists' Ball as Lili



Figure 2: Einar mimicking the movement and gestures of a peep show performer

More examples of how Einar/Lili identifies herself will be discussed in later sections. However, I would argue that even though Lili herself does not fit into the binary division of gender, her idea of gender is still constrained and heavily influenced by the stereotypical principals of *gender norms* (Butler, *ibid*).

Lili's identity transformation is more complex than a simple switch from male to female. Unlike her surgical procedure, her internal transformation is gradual and

complicated. The transformation is not a process that could be explained step by step because there wasn't a clear-cut division of process. The process of her finding herself whilst letting go of her old identity and reconstructing a new identity at the same time proves confusing and chaotic (Hall, 2000). Hence, Lili's journey is one of discovering her 'felt sense' and constructing it (Salamon, 2010; Hall, *ibid*). It is interesting to see how the filmmakers present her confused state whilst she is discovering and building her new identity. Although it may seem like an interesting point, the significance of Lili's identity is not that it is changing, for identity is fluid and always under construction (Hall, *ibid*). It is how the dominant heterosexual normative discourse has had an impact on her identity re-construction.

It is also interesting to look into the interactions or conflicts between Lili and other characters. For example, how Gerda reacts when Lili kisses Henrik Sandahl and discovers her desire to pursue her female identity and how Gerda has come to understand and support her after a while. There is also Einar's childhood friend Hans Axgil who offers to help 'Einar' seek medical support while maintaining a polite and somewhat open-minded attitude towards her transition.

In contrast, there is of course the more aggressive attitude toward her unconventional identity, such as the random pedestrians in Paris who see Lili walking and dressing quite female-like and decided to harass her verbally and afterwards physically abuse her. More of these examples will be discussed more in depth in later sections.

1.2 The Confusing State of Identification: what should we call Lili – the usage of names and pronouns

Similar to the construction of real life identity, Lili's identity in *The Danish Girl* is incomplete and always in constant state of evolving and changing (Hall, 2000).

Therefore, it may be challenging for the viewers of the film to pin down the exact timing of which identity (Lili or Einar) are in play in which situation.

In most of the film, Lili is in the search of her identity and she is confused. She is unsure about herself which causes people around her to also be confused and uncertain about how to react to her confusing state of identity. Even Gerda, the person who seems to be the most supportive to Lili's decision doesn't know how to deal with Lili's state of confusion. In her own words, she says to Lili, "Sorry... I don't know how to hold on to you any longer". Lili does not have role models to follow. Thus she is confused as she has to figure out what it is that she desires.

It is reasonable that while she is building her female identity, she falls back into thinking about the 'heterosexual matrix' as it is something that she is familiar with.

Lili has to create meaning out of the confusing state of identity reconstruction, which leads her to develop a clear-cut division between the identity of Einar and Lili. For Lili to become alive, she has to let go of Einar (Hall, 2000). Lili said to Hans, "Every morning, I promise myself that I will spend the entire day as Einar, but there's so little of Einar left". This statement shows Lili's struggle between her desire and whether or not she would be accepted by the heterosexual normative discourse.

Nevertheless, it is the complexity of her identity that makes this research interesting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As briefly mentioned in the earlier sections, representations of LGBTQ+ people have not always been fair (Miller, 2012; Nelmes, 2012; Gaunlett, 2005; Jones, 2012).

Heterosexual normative discourse has been the dominant discourse in the society of most cultures as well as in films. Therefore, a number of recent films or television shows have made transgendered characters into either elements of entertainment or

deranged people with mental illness at times (Miller, 2012). Nelmes (2012) has also pointed out that the coming out of transgendered characters has often been used as a joke or plot twist in comedies. There are also transgendered characters who were positioned to be mentally unstable serial killers who enjoyed crossdressing. With repetition of this kind of storyline in media representations, transgenderism might connote mental abnormality, farce and danger.

If transgenderism is the abnormality, then what is normal? Butler (2007) outlines the gender and sexuality norm with a term called 'heterosexual matrix'. Inside the heterosexual matrix is the norm while other kinds of sexual orientations, which include transgenders, are to be portrayed as abnormal with unfair and distorted stereotypical views.

2.1 Queer Representations in Media

Over the years, studies of the representations of queerness have been conducted and queer theory has been introduced. However, homosexuality has existed long before the emergence of queer theory in the 1990s. *The Danish Girl* (2015) is a recent representation of a story about a transgendered woman. The absence of representations of queerness reflects how non-heteronormative discourse is deemed to be (a taboo) in the society.

However, there seem to have been a change of this phenomenon in recent years.

Nicole Richter (2013, p.161) writes that there has been an increase in visibility of gay and lesbian characters in television and film in recent years. Yet there are not as many transgendered characters appearing in mainstream films and even when there are transgendered characters, a number of transgendered characters are still

presented as ‘caricatures’¹. Therefore, in the following section, I highlight and summarise some previous research that were done about queer representations and queer film theory.

2.1.1 Overview of Representations of Transgendered People in Films and TV Shows

The movie industry has presented audiences with several types of different transgender characters over the years. There are the struggling protagonists fighting their way to be accepted in the world of discriminating transgenderism, the comedic secondary characters that serve as comedy elements in movies and then there are the psychotic murderers (Miller, 2012; Nelmes, 2012; Phillips, 2006; Stacey 2007).

There are the films that are based on real life events of a transgendered protagonist, whose story is presented in a more complex and non-biased manner such as *The Crying Game* (1992), *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), *About Ray* (2015) and *A Fantastic Woman* (2017). There are also films with a secondary character in comedy movies whose purpose for being in the movie is to serve as an object of farce or a joke to be made fun of in films such as *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994), *Dude Where’s My Car?* (2000), *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005), and *The Hangover Part 2* (2011).

There are also films that make their antagonists morbid and apparently psycho-sexually troubled murderers, such as Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960) and Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

Nonetheless, Richter (2013, p.161) argues that even though films like *The Crying Games* and *Boys Don’t Cry* had a more nuanced tone to representing transgenderism, the two both used transgenderism as their plot twist and ended the movie in a rather tragic way. These two movies’ tragic ending might send out the message that coming

¹ An overly simplified or exaggerated of literal or imagery representation

out as a transgendered person may be dangerous even life threatening. Even though in *The Danish Girl*, Lili dies in the end, the filmmakers make it look beautiful, at peace and not at all tragic (See Figure 3 Figure 4).

The scarf Lili buys for Gerda that was also given to Lili by Gerda when she departed for her first surgery was a symbolic item that represented Lili. The fact that the scarf flies away after Gerda scatters Lili's remains resembles her being freed after all the experiences that she has gone through. The music helps exceedingly with the ambience where it has created a hopeful and upbeat atmosphere.

Hence, the symbolic difference between representations of transgendered people with a tragic ending such as *The Crying Game* and *Boys Don't Cry* and a somewhat hopeful representation like *The Danish Girl* is the message they sent out to the viewers. Films with a tragic ending and a transgendered protagonist send out an indirect message of discouraging transgenderism and connote the danger of coming out as a transgendered person (Miller, 2012).



Figure 3: Lili's scarf blown away by the wind



Figure 4: Gerda smiling after seeing the scarf fly away knowing that Lili is free now

2.1.2 Presenting Difference: Transgender Representations in Films and TV Shows

The Danish Girl is a mainstream Hollywood representation of an unconventional love story which achieved great commercial success. This film is ‘unconventional’ because it portrays the story of a transgender woman. It is stated by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen (2013) that classical Hollywood films share the premise of a man-woman love storyline which is called *heterosexual imperative*.

Unlike the usual heterosexual imperative storyline, *The Danish Girl* has the protagonist of a transgender woman and characters of non-heterosexual orientations. Judith Halberstam (2006) defines transgender as such – “transgender is a gender at odds with sex, a sense of self not derived from the body and an identity that operates within the heterosexual matrix without confirming the inevitability of that system of difference.” As summarised in *Transgender on Screen* by John Phillips (2006, p.11), Stephen Whittle (2000) argues that in the 1990s, the word ‘transgender’ could be addressed to anyone who oppressed their gender identity or gender presentation. That is to say, one could identify as transgender if they sometimes cross-dress or

even most of the time, if they have undergone gender reassignment procedures or simply because they feel that their gender identity/role is unconventional.

In contrast, Butler (1990, cited in Phillips 2006) has a narrower definition of transgender which denotes cross-dressers, drag queens but excludes transsexuals.

Phillips then states that he agreed with Whittle's definition, which is to use transgender in Phillips's words as 'an umbrella term' to cover all the crossing of gender identification whether it is 'temporary or permanently', 'vestimentary or anatomical' (ibid).

In the case of *The Danish Girl*, the main character, Lili, first starts cross-dressing and then later decided that she would like to undergo sexual reassignment procedure. For Lili, her journey of transgenderism is temporary, permanent, vestimentary and anatomical as she undergoes all the processes of transition. As a result, in both Whittle and Phillips's understanding of transgender definition, Lili can be categorised as a transgender woman, while Lili's decision to go through surgical procedure to change her body would be as a transsexual and not a transgender by Butler's definition. However, in this thesis, I would be more inclined to apply Phillips's definition of transgender rather than Butler's as it is more inclusive.

2.1.3 Distorted Transgendered Representations

Transgender people have had some biased representations on screen for years. John Phillips (2006) has analysed transgender representations in television and films by divided them into 3 genres: comedies where transgender is treated as object of ridicule; thrillers where they are seen as mentally ill; and mixed-genre films in which what?

The Danish Girl is undoubtedly an influential piece of work which represents and portrays sexual minorities: transgenders and homosexuals. In this thesis, I argue it is important that this film presents a not distorted/non-stereotypical view toward the marginalised people whose sexual orientations are assigned as unconventional or alternative. This non-heterosexual orientation could also be referred to as queer. It should be noted that to have a non-stereotypical representation of transgendered (queer) character in film is not to create a positive image, but rather to have a 'complex, diverse and nuanced representation' (Dyer, cited in Stam 2011).

This argument is important because an undistorted and popular mainstream representation of queerness has the potential to generate more conversation and raise awareness for the marginalised groups of people or even help the marginalised to be deemed one of the normative group or simply be seen as human. This does not necessarily mean filmmakers need to make more films with queer protagonists, but rather just to have representations with diversified characters. In other words, to make films that are not a *heterosexual imperative* (Demory & Pullen, 2013).

Notwithstanding, as quoted *Queer Love in Film and Television Critical Essays*, Queer Studies scholar Alexander Doty argues that "the queerness of most mass culture texts is less than essential, waiting-to-be-discovered property than the result of acts of production or reception," unless, that is, "the text is *about* queers" (Doty, cited in Demory & Pullen, 2013).

Interestingly, there is an increasing visibility of transgender representations in mainstream media in recent years. In the meantime, Jeremy Miller (2012) suggests that transgender visibility increases in mainstream films, while the violence against transgender persons has not dropped. As mentioned earlier, media can have a certain impact on people's perspective, but its level of influence is hardly quantifiable. One

can only stay hopeful that with more normative representations and time, discrimination and violence against transgender community would improve. If the goal is to have more normative queer representation of either main or secondary characters, then having more nuanced representations of queer people could move us one step closer to the goal.

Some mainstream comedies (mostly featuring a typical masculine male lead) have explicitly used transgender identity to create punchlines at transgender people's expense. As suggested by Miller (2012, p.47), with examples of commercially successful films making fun of their transgender characters, transgendered people were distanced and objectified. More film examples of where transgender characters are targeted as subjects of ridicule can be found in Miller's dissertation in the chapter 'Transgender as Farce' (ibid).

Miller (ibid) argues that this exploitation creates a distance or even an isolation of crossdressing and transgenderism. That is to say, it positions the decision on behalf of the transgendered person, where changing their physical appearance to match their identity would be an abnormality rather than a way of natural self-expression.

In doing so, it suggests that crossdressing and transgender people are not to be looked up to as role models but as subjects of ridicule or mentally ill. These transgender people are seen as representing abnormality within the heterosexual discourse which is why, in some films, transgenderism would be presented as a sort of perversion or illness or even something that people find repulsive.

This phenomenon does not end in film representations; it is also evident in television shows. The greater the exposures of distorted representations of transgenderism, the more influence they could have on their viewers. Unfair representations of transgendered people may have influenced and might already been embedded in

some of the audiences' minds. This kind of heterosexual normative has hegemonised a lot of cultures and societies.

This discourse could also be found in *The Danish Girl*, where it also serves as the hegemonic discourse in this particular world. However, it is important to note how this discourse is illustrated. The filmmakers of *The Danish Girl* present some characters of heterosexual normative discourse as aggressive and unwilling to accept difference. By presenting heterosexual normative discourse as bullies, the filmmakers set out the tone of the film of the opposite direction. In other words, the filmmakers disagree with hegemonising the heterosexual normative discourse. However, while Lili is constructing her female identity, her construction is also influenced by this discourse. Specifically speaking, it is her views on what performing a gender means when having the corresponding sexuality towards the opposite sex (Butler, 2007).

2.1.4 Accepting Differences on Screen

Nevertheless, with the rising awareness of transgender rights in the LGBTQ+ community and beyond, there seem to have been a change in the representations of transgendered people in the mainstream entertainment industry in more recent years. Phillips (2006, p. 51) also state that from the 1990s, queer discourse has been receiving more social acceptance and that television and film have presented this discourse in a less deviant manner. One of the possible reasons for this phenomenon is for filmmakers and viewers to pursue political accuracy in their representations. This change is generated by the negotiation of power between the dominant (the heterosexual normative discourse) and the subordinate (non-heterosexual normative/queer discourse). This idea was also brought up by Jones:

The process of stereotyping involves power: the power of dominant groups to mould the accepted social view of themselves and of those groups that they perceive as marginal. This view can change and develop as certain social groups, such as gays and lesbians, grow in self-awareness, expression and power, so that the dominant groups have to modify their available images. (Jones, 2012, p.308)

It is true that through negotiation of power, there has been some sort of change in power between heterosexual discourse and queer discourse. This power negotiation has resulted in some changes in queer media representations. Such examples of relatively impartial representations of LGBTQ+ people can be found in the films of more recent years. Representations of transgender individuals have occurred amongst likeable fictional main characters on TV series like Nomi Marks in *Sense 8* (2015) or Sophia Burset in *Orange is the New Black* (2013).

It is stated in the study *Romancing the Soap: Representations of Gay Love and Relationships in EastEnders* that, since 1986, with the appearance of the character of Colin Russell in *EastEnders*, the depiction of gay relationships on British television has undergone significant changes. These changes have been in response to altering perceptions of queerness and the political implications of such liaisons (Bradley, 2013). This change in transgender representation in films and television is important as, with more likeable and normative exposure of transgenderism, not only can transgender people find more positive role models in movies, but other audiences can be exposed to works of non-heterosexual normative discourse.

Another notable example of the rise of queer normalisation is the popularity of the television show *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-present). The significance of *RuPaul's Drag Race* is not only that it has been successful in reaching an audience of

considerable size, but the show has also introduced 'drag' to the audiences which challenges normative conceptions of gender, sexuality, beauty and identity (Hicks, 2013).

It is important to make non-biased and truthful representations of queerness and show them to the audiences (ibid). In this way, queerness would not be as alienated and marginalised. I argue that to present the audiences with more non-stereotypical queer representations would be in a way, as Butler suggested, to cause 'gender trouble' (Butler, 2007). Butler (ibid) wrote that it was important to challenge what she referred to as the socially constructed gender norms within the 'heterosexual matrix'. However, as is pointed out by Monique Deveaux (1994), Butler's idea of resisting gender norms in everyday life is idealistic but she fails to provide a practical approach to put the resistance in practice. Even though Butler has not presented the readers with examples of exactly how to subvert gender norms, having more non-heterosexual normative representations could be one way of doing so. Therefore, TV shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* could be taken as subversive. Moreover, if subversion is a priority, it is especially important for mainstream Hollywood Blockbusters film such as *The Danish Girl* to expose their audiences to more non-heterosexual normative films.

In earlier section, I argued for the importance of having more non-heterosexual normative media representations. It is important for the mass to have a normative view on queerness, which is precisely why honest and neutral representations of queer characters in blockbuster movies like *The Danish Girl* is essential. There are, in fact, an increasing number of queer media representations, but are these the ones that can actually serve as cultural subversion? Bradley (2013) quotes Vito Russo in

saying that “homosexuality is no longer in the closet either on or off the screen”, but “mainstream cinema is incapable of giving to members of any minority the kinds of films that truly touch their lives and experiences”.

This circumstance could be or is already changing gradually at the moment, as long as non-biased queer content in films keep being created and produced. For example, over last year and this year alone (2017-2018), have seen some releases of well-recognised and highly-rated quality films telling the stories of people in the LGBTQ+ community, such as *Battle of the Sexes*, *A Fantastic Woman*, *Call Me by Your Name* and *Love Simon*.

2.2 Normalising Queer/LGBTQ+ in television and films: ‘reappropriating’ queer

Characters with non-heterosexual orientations do not always feature in television and film representations. For years, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders have been invisible and hidden in mainstream television (Gaunlett, 2008, p.88). Gaunlett (ibid) gives two notable examples of non-heterosexual representation in television not being accepted by the public viewers and causing the production to suffer a financial loss. The first one is in 1990, where the ABC network aired two men sitting in the bed not engaging in any physical contact in *Thirtysomething* - it resulted in the network losing half of their advertisers and over a million US dollars.

The other one is the well-known American lesbian TV show host Ellen DeGeneres. She came out of the closet both in real life and on television in her coming out episodes *The Puppy Episode* in her own sitcom *Ellen* in 1997. After these two episodes were aired, the ‘scandal’ that is the show host’s sexual preference generated

tremendous controversy which caused advertisers to withdraw and Disney/ABC to drop out of the show.

Similar to the situation in television, films have also been hostile and neglectful of LGBTQ+ representations over the past few years. It is not until the highly appreciated and commercially successful film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) came out that Hollywood had 'officially' accepted and embraced alternative sexuality (ibid). Hence, the development of normalising queerness in media representations has not been smooth or easy. Gaunlett (ibid) described the emergence of LGBTQ+ people into the mainstream media as 'sluggish'. He continues, stating that it is not until recent years that people have gotten used to seeing LGBTQ+ representations as 'regular' characters. That is to say, the sexuality of LGBTQ+ people is not deemed as a shocking factor but rather a natural feature (ibid). Examples in both television and films can be given, such as David Fisher who was in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). David married his partner and adopted two children; meanwhile, *The L Word* (2004-2009) with an entire cast of lesbian characters and stories build around them. In addition to the examples given above by Gaunlett, Kenneth Chan (2013, p.24) writes sitcoms with LGBTQ+ characters such as *Will & Grace* (1998-2006), *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) and *The L Word* (2004-2009) to give a normalised image to view of queer love which has been introduced to a generation of viewers. As a result, the chances of these viewers having a more normative view on queerness could be higher than the ones who are exposed to the distorted representations of queerness. According to Nelmes (2012), film is distinctly categorised in three categories: 'classical narrative', 'anti-classical' and 'counter-cinema' also known as 'art cinema' or 'avant-garde'. 'Classical-cinema' usually consists of a hero figure who is the

central protagonist. The protagonist is the character to which audiences empathise and relate, while the story is normally carried out in a linear manner.

The structure of the film is fairly simple which begins with an established premise for the audience to acquire a sense of the world of the story. Hence, it would introduce a twist which can either be a problem to be solved or any other situation that complicates the plot. Finally, it would follow with an ending that in some way resolves the complication (ibid).

In the case of *The Danish Girl*, Lili as the protagonist of the film, is made to be the heroine whom audiences could look up to. The twist obviously would be her finding out her identity of a woman and her endeavour of becoming one.

In the film, the key obstacle that stands in the way of Lili's pursuit to her identity is society's view on transgenderism. A lot of people in the film, or mostly doctors, are heavily influenced by the discourse of seeing transgender as a sort of illness and perversion. In a way, the way characters/people in the film see transgenderism will resemble the views of people in real life on this particular subject.

Nelmes (2012) argues that the way gender/sexual orientation is portrayed in films does resemble the real-life situation and, to some extent, reflects the anxieties and concerns of society. Namely, if heterosexual normative discourse is the dominant discourse in the real world, then the dominant discourse in the film might also be heterosexual normative. In addition, how the viewers rate and respond to films like *The Danish Girl* would also indicate their attitudes toward non-heterosexual orientation.

Hence, the media text interacts with its audiences and seek to form certain ideas and attitudes for its viewers. According to Jones (2012, p.299), representation is a social process which occurs in the interactions between a reader or viewer, and a text. It

produces signs which reflect underlying sets of ideas and attitudes. For cases like media text that involve queer representations, how the text is presented might have a different impact on the viewers.

2.3 Queer Theory in Films

Stam (2011, p.262-263) writes that while film theories were first introduced in the 1980s, the usual, normative representations are white, European and heterosexual. That is to say, representations outside of the three features mentioned above would be outside of the normative spectrum.

What film theory can apply to representations that exist outside of the 'normative' framework? Later, queer film theory was introduced; here, Ellis Hanson (1993, cited in Stacey 2007) writes that 'queer' is a term that does not specify a particular sexual identity or practice, but rather refers to the desire of 'the odd, the uncanny, the undecidable' in the psychoanalytic sense.

In contrast, Stam (2011) suggests that psychoanalysis fails to acknowledge class. Marxism did not include race and gender in its argument, but both psychoanalysis and Marxism exclude any discussion of sexuality, which is the reason why there is a queer theory for explaining sexuality.

In turn, John Phillips (2006) recaps that queer theory is mostly associated with Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky's work. Their work derives from the post-structuralist idea of identity being decentred and unfinished. Hence, the work that was later known as queer theory was built on three ideas from different scholars: 1. Jacques Lacan's subjects are unconsciously constructed 2. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of binary concepts 3. Michel Foucault's notion of subjectivity based on discourse.

It should be noted that Stam (2011) also concludes that queerness seems to be the blind spot of all the theories. Ironically, similar to the situation of LGBTQ+ community, queerness has been neglected and marginalised by most scholars until the creation of queer theory.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines the word 'queer' in four ways: "a. differing in some odd way from what is usual or normal, b. eccentric, unconventional, mildly insane: touched, c. absorbed or interested to an extreme or unreasonable degree: obsessed d. often disparaging & offensive (1): sexually attracted to members of the same sex: homosexual, gay (2): of, relating to, or used by homosexuals: gay." Of these definitions of 'queer' given above, it is not easy to connote positivity with this word. One would imagine originally that when the word was used to describe people of non-heterosexual orientation, it carries a certain degree of negative connotation. However, it should be noted that the Webster dictionary also points out that in the last 20 years, there has been a 'change' in the use of this word which refers to sexuality.

Stam (2011, p.263) also stated that the word 'queer' has been re-appropriated in a positive and "proud, get-used-to-it" assertion of difference term by gay and lesbian theorists. This re-appropriation of the term 'queer' was carried out by an activists' movement called Gay Liberation (on the model of Black and Women's Liberation). While the pejorative use still exists, we should also consider the use by some LGBTQ+ people and some academics as neutral or even positive. Gauntlett (2008, p. 145) hence defines and explains the origin of queer theory as followed:

Queer theory, despite being one interpretation of its name, is not a theory of homosexuality (although it does have some things to say about it). It is an approach to sexuality and more generally, identity, which builds on some of the ideas developed by Michel Foucault. The first and in my view, the most valuable version of queer theory was put forward by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). It should be pointed out that Butler herself didn't label her *Gender Trouble* argument as 'queer theory'.

Gauntlett (ibid) has hence put together a clear and easy to grasp summary for queer theory, listing seven important aspects of queer theory. First, identity is never fixed nor finished in the sense that it is never done. Second, one's identity does not reflect solely on what one has previously said about oneself or has been said by others. Third, the idea of 'inner self' does not really exist but comes from repeated discourses about the idea. Fourth, all aspects of identity, including gender, are performative with or without one's consciousness. Gender is also reinforced through a repetition of practices. Fifth, people can change as identity is fluid. Sixth, the binary division of masculinity/men and femininity/women is constructed socially. Seventh, the traditional view of masculinity and femininity can and should be challenged by causing 'gender trouble' (ibid, p.147). Hence, queer theory does not support binary division of gender and, in fact, it is suggested that gender is more complex than a clear-cut division only consisting of a man and woman.

3. METHOD

To conduct this qualitative research, my approach to uncovering the meaning in media texts is through discourse analysis (Foucault, 1977). The text of this film includes literature texts which constitute the dialogue/lines delivered by the

actors/actresses and visual codes which include costumes, props, make-up, actors' facial expressions, gestures, movements and camera emphasis. Similar to day-to-day conversations, the words might have different meanings, while they are delivered in different tones or under different circumstances. It is also important to listen to what the characters are saying as well as how they are saying it and what is not being mentioned in that conversation.

The first analysis will apply representation theory to the film, *The Danish Girl*.

Instead of only focusing on the literal text of languages and signs, I would employ Foucault's discursive approach to investigate the discourse which made the texts meaningful. Therefore, in this section, I will look into how the sovereign binary masculine-feminine (heteronormative) discourses are presented in the film and how the subordinate discourse interact with the dominant heteronormative discourse.

The second core analysis will be to apply identity theory to the film. Here I will argue that identity is fluid and can change. I will also discuss how identity is constructed.

The final core analysis will employ gender (queer) theory by Judith Butler to the film. In this part, I will use Butler's idea of gender being socially constructed rather than being naturally formed. I will also discuss how normative gender stereotypes and expectations are manifested through practice in the film, to exemplify specifically how gender identity is fluid and complex that it is difficult to pin down and, most importantly, to think and consider whether or not, this film could be a practice of gender 'subversion' that has been inspired by Butler's idea of subverting gender.

These discussion sections are divided into three separate parts. However, it is also important to look at all three of them as a whole as they are all connected to one another in this film analysis.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Representation of *The Danish Girl*

As mentioned in the introduction, *The Danish Girl* (2015), the film is based on a novel which tells the real-life story of Lili Elbe. This film is the representation of the novel and protagonist's real-life story.

In this section, the analysis will be built on a few chosen scenes that are significant and interesting to analyse. To analyse these selected scenes, I will apply Michel Foucault's idea of discourse to uncover the meanings of said scenes. According to Foucault (1998), discourses shape the way people perceive things and how people might perceive themselves. It was also Foucault who stated that while discussing discourse, one should always discuss the power that is behind that discourse; that is, to consider within a discourse, which group is in the more powerful position against which group.

In *The Danish Girl*, it is apparent that the dominant discourse was the heterosexual normative one. Therefore, most people/characters' ways of looking at gender and sexuality would lean toward heterosexuality. As a result, most characters, including Lili and Gerda, will most likely be under the influence of heterosexual normative discourse.

The reason why there are conflicts and struggles during realisation and reconstruction of Lili's identity is that Lili and Gerda have to challenge and fight the discourse to which they are accustomed. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the

characters who abide by the rules and restrictions of the heterosexual normative discourse are merely the followers and believers of their 'regime of truth' (Foucault, *ibid*).

Perhaps these people might have change their mind should there be a change in the discourse in power. In other words, should the non-heterosexual normative discourse not prove influential, then people might not feel as hostile toward the queer.

However, the filmmakers of *The Danish Girl* illustrate that a lot of these people just come across as close-minded bullies. In doing so, the filmmakers were expressing their political stands on heterosexual normative discourse in a straightforward and slightly aggressive way.

It has been established in earlier section that the film is meaningful and carries message. Does the message include a political stand? Foucault (1977) suggests that with knowledge and meaning which exists within discourse, but with discourse there is power. Films are thus representational artwork of certain world consisting of people who operates under certain ideology(ies). It is written in *Film Theory: An Introduction*, that,

coming after a period associated with a belief in 'the end of ideology', when film criticism had been largely concerned with aesthetic questions, film theory now declared that all criticism was inescapably political. Critics and filmmakers, as indeed all other artists and intellectuals, could no longer, it was asserted, take refuge in an art-for-art's-sake aestheticism, but must submit their practices to the political challenge of whether they furthered or obstructed progressive social change (Lapsley & Westlake, 1992, p.1).

Nonetheless, the filmmakers' disagreement with the heterosexual normative discourse is an example of challenging gender norms.

4.1.1 Discourse and Power

As mentioned earlier, it is important to consider the power relations while looking into a certain discourse (Foucault, *ibid*). What kind of meaning does heterosexual normative discourse carry? Which group has more power within a discourse? And what kind of consequences might it have on people in *The Danish Girl*? What kind of restrictions and constraints does the discourse come with? Stuart Hall recapped Foucault's idea of discourse and stated that:

By 'discourse', Foucault meant 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But... since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect'. (Hall, 1992, p.291)

In other words, language itself does not carry meanings. It is the knowledge which contained a certain historical background and topic within a particular discourse that offered meanings to languages. It should also be noted that without discourse there would be no meaning.

Therefore, texts which are presented and delivered by the film are then only meaningful within certain discourse. For example, when the random pedestrians in Paris harass Lili by asking if she were 'lesbian', that would be an insult under the heterosexual normative discourse. Without this discourse, that statement would not mean anything.

By 'text' here, not only literal texts were included, I would also consider gesture, facial expressions and tones as a part of visual text. By stating this, my argument is

that even some gestures and movements would be gendered. Moreover, while something is gendered, it could then be considered as gender appropriate within the heterosexual matrix.

In earlier sections, it is worth mentioning that there are two discourses that were in power negotiation in *The Danish Girl*. One is the heterosexual normative discourse which, by definition, is the discourse approves of only the heterosexual orientation. On the other hand, it excludes non-heterosexual orientation, deeming it abnormal and out of the normative spectrum. This was the dominant discourse in the film; that is to say, most people in the film are under the ‘constraints and regulations’ of said discourse (Foucault, 1977). Their thoughts and behaviours operate within this discourse, which is why to their knowledge, transgenderism would be considered as sexual ‘abnormality’.

Transgender is hence outside of the heterosexual framework. Meanwhile, the other discourse presented in the film is the discourse on the opposite side of heterosexual normative discourse. This is the discourse that includes LGBTQ+ people and in this thesis, I would refer it as the non-heterosexual normative or queer discourse.

Moreover, even though I have referred this discourse as ‘non-heterosexual normative’ discourse, it should be noted that it does not exclude or marginalise heterosexuals. This discourse deems all kinds of sexual orientation as normal and every one of each are no more or less superior than the other. Hence, this non-heterosexual normative/queer discourse derived from queer theory.

4.1.2 In Between of Heterosexual Normative discourse and Queer Discourse – the Struggle of Lili/Einar

When Einar is first introduced to the audiences, his thoughts and behaviours were restricted and constrained by this discourse. When Gerda asked him to stand in for Ulla due to her absence to be Gerda's model, Einar refused to put on Ulla's dress (See Figure 5).

What could be the possible reason for Einar's refusing to put on the dress even when he is only with his wife? Einar's mindset and actions at that time are the consequences of the heterosexual normative discourse. He knows that to be a man who puts on women's clothes is not common practice for people in his society. This kind of action would be out of the norm of heterosexual normative discourse, but the function of discourse that makes people think and act within certain acceptable disciplines entailing that people will 'police themselves' (Foucault, 1975).



Figure 5: Einar refused to put on Ulla's dress

At this point of the film, Einar has not yet started crossdressing. The way he thinks about how male and female should behave is still based on the traditional man–masculine and woman–feminine configuration. It should be noted that despite the fact that reconstruction of Lili's identity is, to an extent, still under the imposition of

heteronormative discourse, Lili's decision to undergo the sexual reassignment surgery was still revolutionary and pioneering.

Nonetheless, Einar's refusal to put on women's clothing suggested that this behaviour is unlikely to be acceptable in the society in which they are living.

Moreover, it is also a possibility that this discourse creates conflict in Einar's desire of becoming a woman caused actual physical pain and illness (See Figure 6). Einar feels stomach pain after he confessed to Gerda that he has been seeing Henrik behind Gerda's back.



Figure 6: Einar feels physical pain after talking about sharing a kiss with Hans Axgil as Lili when he was a boy back in his hometown

Foucault's idea of discourse was brought up by (Lapsley & Westlake, 1992) that every perspective was embodied in a discourse and each discourse would produce a different version of reality, specifying equally what would be defined as objectively the case and what is to count as true and false. In *The Danish Girl*, the people who represent the discourse of heterosexual normative is portrayed as villains that bullied Lili.

Lili is the representative of the oppressed queer discourse. Their conflict could be seen as the negotiation of power between heterosexual normative discourse and queer discourse. Even though both discourses are presented and the heterosexual normative discourse is the dominant discourse in the film, the film's narrative leans toward queer discourse. The political stand of the filmmakers is hence in favour of having more nuanced representations of queerness.

To have normative and undistorted representation of queer characters is important (Miller, 2012). Examples could be given as such: the secondary character of a normative background contrasting with the tragic story of films with a strong prejudice and violence against gay people such as *Brokeback Mountain* and *A Single Man* often sends out the connotation of coming out as queer as tragic and dangerous that does not end well.

The Gaze of the Dominated Group: Male Gaze and Patriarchy

Other evidence points to the dominant discourse in the film which, in fact, is male dominant and heterosexual as the suggestion of a female gaze is 'unsettling' for male. This event happened earlier in the film to give the audience a sense of what the world (the film) was like and who was in power. Moreover, his moment was especially important because without setting the dominant discourse, Lili's endeavour of becoming a woman would not be as challenging or as 'scandalous' as it may appeared.

In the beginning of the film, Gerda was painting a portrait for a man. The man requested to be left alone with only Gerda when she painted the picture. The conversation took place in their home/studio. When Gerda's model/client showed appreciation of Einar's absence in the studio, Gerda showed her empathy and said,

“It’s hard for a man to be looked at by a woman. Women are used to it, of course, but for a man, to um, submit to a woman’s gaze. It’s unsettling.” It is suggested in the rather short conversation that women are used to being the objectified target of men’s gaze. According to Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (Mulvey, 1975, p.11).

From what Mulvey’s theory is suggesting, in the male-dominated world, female is often perceived as the object of male’s visual pleasure. In other words, the female is the objectified substance by the male gaze. Therefore, the possible implication of this conversation is that in the world of this film, women are often the object of men’s gaze. It was also implied that there was a ‘sexual imbalance’ in that world that women were not in the same position of power as men. This theory of ‘the male gaze’ associated with the idea of objectifying women and patriarchy is proposed by Laura Mulvey.

As pointed out by Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman’s *The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing* (1995), ideas about the association of the male gaze with patriarchy (female being objectified) was not only suggested by Mulvey but raised by feminist critics. Simone de Beauvoir also pointed out in her work *The Second Sex* that during her adolescent, she herself had learned to be accustomed to being looked at by men as an adornment (Dini, 2017).

However, Evans and Gamman (1995) have also pointed out the risk of misusing the ‘male gaze’ in academic settings. They (ibid) summarised that the ‘gaze theory’ has been used in two major ways. The first one is Foucault’s idea of the ‘panopticon’ where a spherical prison could use for controlling gaze. This type of gaze brought power and knowledge in relation. The second one is film theorists’ cinematic gaze by employing psychoanalysis. Hence, this cinematic gaze theory may only be useful on representations, rather than all types of cultural practices.

It should be noted that the gaze theory was often used without a clear distinction from the ‘look’ to the ‘gaze’. It is said that the look is associated with the eyes and the gaze is associated with the phallus (ibid). Ironically, it is also pointed out by Evans and Gamman (ibid) that “the phrase ‘the objectifying male gaze’ has become a cliché used to identify the way men look at women, almost as a metaphor of patriarchal relations.” Nonetheless, we see in this film, even though it was presented in a clichéd way, Gerda’s conversation with her client has still set the tone of the film which includes an indication of the presence of patriarchy.

4.1.4 The Fight Between Two Discourses in the Expressional form of Lili’s Physical and Psychological Pain

In the early stage of her discovering and experimenting with her female identity, the conflict of her struggle with rediscovering her identity is presented as physical pain by the filmmakers. The physical pain Lili experiences is an expression of her inner struggle. She knows that what she desires is not within the heterosexual normative discourse that she was accustomed to. Hence, when Lili and Henrik Sandahl shared a kiss at the Artists’ Ball, she then starts to have a bad nose bleed.

Another example of her struggle with the battle of her identity can be found in figure 6, before Einar (I use Einar because at the time, Lili has only just started to discover her identity and is still identified as Einar for most of the time; in particular, this conversation has happened between Einar and Gerda talking about Lili (as a third person) when Einar starts feeling pain in the stomach. He admits to Gerda that he had been seeing Henrik Sandahl as Lili behind Gerda's back ever since the Artists' Ball. Einar told Gerda about that one time when 'Lili' kissed a boy (Hans Axcil) years ago in Vejle which was Einar's childhood home.

At this point, the inner struggle for Lili is at its most momentous, as Lili has only just started to discover and experiment with her identity. She has been spending time with Henrik to experience the feeling of being a woman. More accurately, Lili is starting to enjoy being treated as a woman. This recognition has led to the possible reason for her fit of temper after Henrik called out the name 'Einar' when they were necking in the heat of passion.

Lili storms out of Henrik's house because she wants to be there as Lili, but she finds out that Henrik has seen her as Einar all the time they spent together. Lili is also questioning and unsure about what she wants at this present time. She feels strongly about her desire of being a woman while, at the same time, she struggles to comply to the gender norms by remaining her identity as Einar.

More about Lili's identity will be discussed in the gender section. Perhaps another factor that adds up to the complexity and causes her physical and mental pain is Einar's/Lili's love for Gerda. The fact that he is married to Gerda and not wanting to hurt her feelings would also contribute as a pressure to Lili's re-inventing herself. It should be highlighted that throughout the film, Einar and Gerda has been referring to 'Lili' and 'Einar' as two different and separate human beings.

Even up until the very end of the film, Lili still talks about Einar as if he were a separate person. Perhaps this is their way of making sense of Lili's confusing state of identity discovery; for instance, it could be their way to ease the psychological pain of fighting against the dominant discourse. Moreover, this way of making Einar's identity disappear would be gradual and more tolerable for Gerda. This could be Lili's gentle way of caring for Gerda since Gerda is having a difficult time letting go of Einar at first.

For Lili herself, she has referred to her male parts more than once as sickness or as the disguise that need to be removed/cured. It is interesting to see some of Lili's view on gender actually matches with Butler's gender performativity (2007). This view of Lili's is outside of the heterosexual normative discourse. Lili believes that Einar is the 'disguise' that she has been forced to construct and perform in order to comply to the society's expectations that come with her natural born male body. Hence, for Lili, to maintain and keep Einar's identity was a painful task. Although out of her love for Gerda, she continued to do so until the point that she no longer able to. At this point, Lili's understanding of her own identity has become clearer. She knows that she only wants her female identity and it is more than crossdressing that she desires.

One might assume that, at this point, Lili will be operating under the effects of queer discourse, but that assumption is incorrect. Lili's gender reconstruction will be discussed more in gender section. Meanwhile, it is important to note how powerful the dominant discourse has been in affecting the people in the film. This discourse can actually cause stress and anxiety to the point that it would even appear in the form of physical pain in the stomach ache and nose bleed that Einar experiences.

4.1.5 Within the Heterosexual Normative Discourse: Medical Discourse

Being under the restrictions and rules of the heterosexual normative discourse, Gerda and Einar feel that they should seek help from medical professionals for this abnormality that Einar is experiencing. Gerda and Einar go to see the first doctor from the stomach pain incident discussed earlier. This doctor diagnoses the cause of Einar's stomach pain and the appearance of Lili as chemically imbalance and not psychological problem.

Hence, he believes that it is the lack of testosterone causing this illness. In his words, it is 'the confused state of masculinity and the infertility'. It is clear that for this doctor, men are supposed to be masculine and what is causing Einar's 'abnormality' (femininity) and his fail to impregnate Gerda is an actual physical illness. From the facial expression and the character portrayal of the doctor (See Figure 7 & Figure 8), he appears to be highly unlikable. His tone when performing an examination of Einar is aggressive and unpleasant. Hence, he is the human representation of heterosexual normative discourse and as such is shown to be an abominable bully.

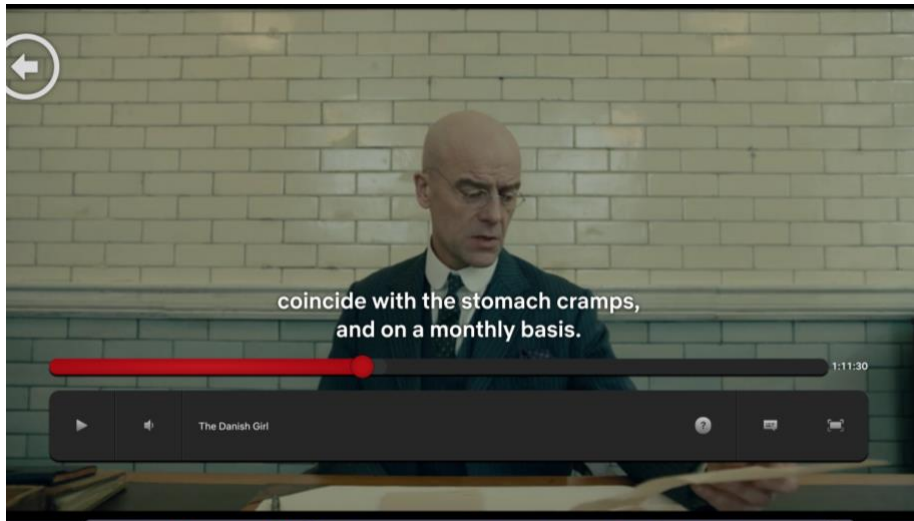


Figure 7: the first doctor they see diagnoses the illness as being caused by chemical imbalance which could be treated with radiation

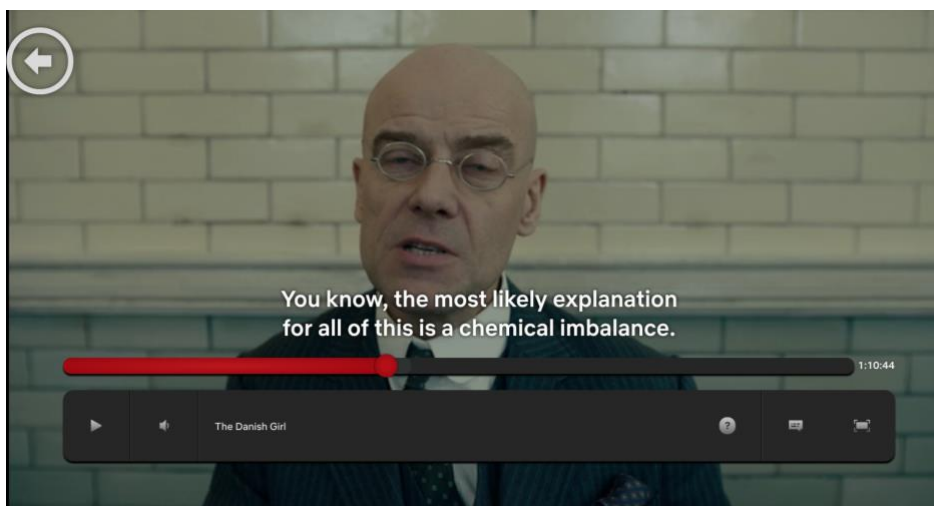


Figure 8: diagnosis of chemical imbalance

That doctor is not only the first doctor Gerda and Einar go to see. In fact, all of the doctors except for Dr. Warnekros, who was the one to perform Lili's surgeries, believes that Lili is either insane or sick. They all suggest treating this 'illness', similar to how most other people in the film think, as all the doctors except Dr.

Warnekros think of Einar's transgenderism as sickness. Some believe it is a physical illness, while some believe it is mental.

These doctors hence think of transgenderism as 'madness' under the influence of the dominant heterosexual normative discourse. It is not uncommon to think transgenderism as an illness. As a matter of fact, Hall (2013, p. 31) echoes Foucault's conception of historicised discourse in stating,

"Thus, for Foucault, for example, mental illness was not an objective fact, which remained the same in all historical periods, and meant the same thing in all cultures. It was only *within* a definite discursive formation that the object, 'madness', could appear at all as a meaningful or intelligible construct. It was 'constituted by all that was said, in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its development, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own'"

The way that the filmmakers portrayed these doctors made them unkind and unlikeable. Interestingly, although Lili does not refer to her female identity as illness, she does refer to Einar having an illness, which she calls 'a disguise', although she is later corrected by Dr. Warnekros. Again, the discourse of placing transgenderism as medical abnormality is a sort of institutional power imposed onto these doctors. This discourse is their 'regime of truth'.

Nevertheless, these people who were not in favour of Lili's choice of reconstructing her identity are made out to be narrowed-minded bullies by the filmmakers. First of all, there is verbal abuse; for example, the doctors who insulted Einar (in Figure 7 & Figure 8). Secondly, while looking into the way they delivered their lines from their facial expressions and tones, they are illustrated to be unlikable to the viewers. They

are portrayed as highbrowed charlatans rather than medical professionals. From the indications mentioned above, it is clear that the filmmakers' position on transgenderism favours non-heterosexual normative discourse more than the other.

4.1.6 The Unconventional Representation of Gender Roles

Gender stereotyping and gender in media representations often follow the rule of specific features of gender, meaning that men are portrayed as masculine and women as feminine. It is stated in *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* that:

Overall, men were more likely to be assertive (or aggressive), whilst women were more likely to be passive. Men were much more likely to be adventurous, active, and victorious, whereas women were more frequently shown as weak, ineffectual, victimised, supportive, laughable or 'merely token females' (Gunter, cited in Gauntlett, 2008).

At the beginning of the film, Einar refers to his wife Gerda as "the beautiful, fearless Gerda" whilst recapturing the story of how they first met. Gerda was the one who initiated and asked Einar out on a date, thus beginning their love story that later leads to marriage. Therefore, contrary to what the normal gender 'stereotypes' should be, Gerda goes the opposite way.

As for Einar, being the passive recipient of Gerda's invitation, he is then characterised as the less assertive (masculine) person in their relationship. It may be observed that the filmmakers have tried to make an effort to break the stereotypical gender norm right from the start of the film by presenting a strong female supporting character, Gerda Wegener. Gerda had her own career as a painter while being married to Einar, who was a significantly more successful painter than she is in the beginning.

It is interesting to note that when Lili was Einar, while Gerda and Einar have sexual intercourse similar to how their relationship started, it seemed as if Gerda was usually the person who took the lead (See Figure 9). Right in the beginning of the film, a conversation between them takes place to set the tone of their relationship as a couple. As Gerda goes to wake Einar up in the morning, Einar asked Gerda if she would like to come back to bed. Gerda said, “You think I can’t resist you?” “Do you want to resist me?” Einar asked. Gerda replied, “No, but I’d like you to ask nicely, so I don’t feel like such a pushover.”

From this short conversation, it is apparent that there is love and sexual desire between the two. They are happily married and they enjoy spending time together. It should be noted that Gerda has even used the phrase ‘can’t resist’. This sort of conversation would normally happen with the roles in reverse. In other words, normally in film representations, it would be the female trying to lure the male into sexual intercourse rather than the other way around.

As Gaunlett (2008) suggests earlier in his statement of the overall connotation of masculinity and femininity would carry, Gerda is associated with the masculine adjective whereas Einar shares more similarity with adjectives that demonstrates femininity. From the beginning of the film, the filmmakers are hence placing hints and giving signs which point toward Einar’s feminine features. However, what needs to be noted is that these signs are the usual expression of ‘performed’ gender (Butler, 2007).



Figure 9: Gerda as the strong dominant party in their relationship

4.2 Identity

Lili's identity goes through an interesting change. She does not always feel like she is a woman. In fact, she had identified as a man and had a life as Einar the painter for years before she came to the conclusion that she was a woman. After she discovers her female identity, she doesn't jump to the conclusion of becoming a woman right away. Instead, she has some inner struggles with the existing and dominant heterosexual normative discourse.

After a while, she still feels as if she is more inclined to become Lili rather than, in her own words, 'performing' the identity of Einar. Thus, the opportunity presents itself of a surgical operation that will change her physical appearance. This is the time when Lili finally has the opportunity to be herself and Gerda completely leaves her identity as Einar behind.

In this section, I will uncover the complexity of Lili's change in her identity.

Although Lili's identity might be complex, it should be noted that all identities are rather difficult to understand. Hall (1996) argues in *Who Needs 'Identity'?* that identification turns out to be one of the least well-understood concepts – almost as

tricky as the conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter. There is no doubt there is certain complexity in Lili's identity that even herself does not understand, but the complexity is what makes this investigation interesting. Moreover, her identity is represented as being reconstructed by the filmmakers and later open to the audience for various interpretations.

The first thing that should be noted is that identity is always under construction and is never finished (Hall, 2000). Therefore, changes of identity are not an uncommon phenomenon. The significance of Lili's identity is that changing gender identity was considerably controversial at that time. Being that the notion of changing one's given gender is outside of the heterosexual normative discourse, transgenderism would even now be controversial in some cultures.

4.2.1 Identity is Fluid

Hall (1996) suggests that identity is always under construction and that it was always evolving and changing and nothing about identity is 'fixed'. Du Gay (2000) also wrote that identity is 'fluid'. Queer theory also suggests that identity is fluid and it can be changed. Therefore, it should be noted that the change of Lili's identity is not as simple as converting from male to female. In the film, while the significant and most apparent change was Lili's gender change from male to female, undeniably the more interesting change lies in Lili's reconstruction of her identity.

As mentioned earlier, as one's identity is constantly changing, Lili too constructs her identity all through the film. In applying the fluidity of identity scholars and the queer theory to Lili's identity change, we can see that Lili's action of changing her

identity from a man to a woman does not seem to be as shocking or as outrageous as the reactions of other people in the film suggest.

Nonetheless, Lili's decision to become a woman was still revolutionary. As pioneering as the act of Lili's building her female identity was, it should be noted that during the construction of her identity, Lili still cannot fully escape the influence of the social constraints and norms that heterosexual normative discourse has on her. That is to say, although Lili is making her identity meaningful and discovering herself, she is still somehow under the regulation of heterosexual normative discourse. For example, her attempt to appear more 'like a woman' is to dress up, talk and move like one.

All these actions suggest that in order to be a woman, there are certain rules to follow and these rules fall within the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 2007). Lili's dressing up in women's clothes would also suggest that outfits and inanimate objects are gendered. Lili's identity reconstruction within the gender norms will hence be discussed at further length in the gender section.

4.2.2 Reconstructing an Identity on the bases of Previous Identity/ies

Since Lili is a transgendered woman, much of the focus on Lili's identity has been based around gender. However, gender is not the only element that contributes to one's identity and even not, in Lili's case of being a transgender woman. What other social aspects could have possibly had an impact on Lili's identity? Would Lili be able to go through the surgery if she were not a higher/middle class person? Would Lili have the chance to learn about 'sexual abnormality' if she were not a well-educated person? Would Lili be able to travel all the way to Germany to have the surgery or to Paris to even hear of the doctor (Professor Wanerkros) to begin with?

Here, Gaunlett points out the relevance of what other aspects of identity could have an impact on a person:

Identities of course, are complex constructions, and gender is only one part of an individual's sense of self. Ethnicity is obviously an important aspect of identity, and like gender may be felt to be more or less central to self-identity by each individual, or might be *made* significant by external social circumstances (such as a racist regime or community). Other much discussed axes of identity include class, age, disability and sexuality. In addition, a range of other factors may contribute to a sense of identity, such as education, urban or rural residency, cultural background access to transportation and communications, criminal record, persecution or refugee status. Furthermore, whilst usually less significant in terms of overall 'life chances', any aspects of the physical body can be relevant to self-identity: for example, whether one is seen as overweight or underweight, tall or short, hairy or shaven or bald, or wearing spectacles, unusual clothes, or piercings (Gaunlett, 2008, p.15).

From the beginning of the film, it is clear that Einar is a quite successful landscape painter in Denmark. His name is known in artistic society. His success overshadowed Gerda's painting career in the beginning as he was said to be the best landscape painter his dealer was working with.

Moreover, from the social events he and Gerda attended and from the clothes and attire they have on, it is safe to assume they came from at a least middle-class background. They both went to art college and that was where they met each other. They were a young couple who were well-educated, suave and lived in Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark. This information might not seem as significant as Lili's gender identity, but they still contribute as possible influential factors.

From all the information above, additional clues to Lili's identity are given. Even though it is half-way into the film, there are indications that Gerda and Lili are under

stress because of financial problems. Overall, the two seemed to be living a comfortable life with not much worries about money. However, without this financial background, Lili might not be able to afford her sexual reassignment surgery.

As for Lili's other identities, she is so hyper-focused on her gender identity that she would leave behind all her former identities while she is still Einar. In other words, she has given up most other of her identities during her time as Einar. These identities include a man, Gerda's husband and a painter. It should be noted that she did not abandon all these identities promptly. It was not until she first has her surgery to remove the external sexual organ, she has finally left all her identities as Einar completely behind. She has even stopped painting altogether. Her exact words are "I want to be a woman, not a painter."

Lili has helped Gerda set up the canvas and model for Gerda. Lili hence stops being the provider of their family and starts to become the one who stays in and cook for meals. Again, if we apply the stereotypical gender position to this change, Lili has changed from being the breadwinner to adopt the role of a 'housewife'.

4.2.3 Excluding Einar and Reinventing Lili

There is no doubt that one person can have more than one identity. However, can the identities contradict with one another? In this part, I would apply identity theory to explore the complexity that is Lili's identity in *The Danish Girl*. Lili is identified as a transgendered woman, which means that in her mindset, she is not a man. She has excluded her former identity as a man. At the same time, to identify as something

means to exclude other things. Hall (2000, p.17) in *Who Needs 'Identity'*, points out the 'excluding and marking' function in identities. Here Hall quotes Laclau (1993),

If... an objectivity manages to partially affirm itself it is only by repressing that which threatens it. Derrida has shown how an identity's constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles – man/woman, etc. What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. It is the same with the black-white relationship, in which white, of course is equivalent to 'human being'. 'Woman' and 'black' are thus 'marks' (i.e. marked items) in contrast to the unmarked terms of 'man' and 'white'.

While Lili is identified as a transgendered woman, she is excluded from heterosexual group. Therefore, if heterosexuality is the norm, Lili would then be excluded from the norm. However, in the film, Lili has constantly to attempt to position herself as a heterosexual woman. After Lili has her first surgery, not only does she exclude her male identity as Einar entirely, but she also excludes her identity as Gerda's husband.

She has constructed her identity by leaving her identity as Einar all behind. First, she has stopped painting altogether, which means she has left her identity as Einar the painter behind first. Then she has stopped showing affection to Gerda physically because she has built her identity as Lili by leaving Einar's identities behind.

However, during the construction of her identity as Lili, she has built it within the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 2007). She believes that to perform her female identity, she would then have to have desire for men, which is the reason why they have a sheet in between them in bed to separate themselves (See Figure 10).

Lili's views on sexuality will be discussed in more detail later in the gender section using Butler's theory to explain her views and actions. Meanwhile, I will explain Lili's determination to leave Einar's identity behind as the means of her identity reconstruction.

In Figure 10, a conversation takes place after Lili and Gerda go back to live in Denmark after her first surgery. Gerda is lying in bed with Lili but with a see-through white fabric between the two and said, "You know, one night last week, I had the strangest dream." "What was it?" "I dreamed you were getting married." "Do you think I ever will?" "Who knows? So many strange things have happened." "I do want to, Gerda." "It's not so long ago we were married, you and me." Lili then touches the fabric barrier between them. "You and Einar" "I know it was Einar, but really, it was you and me." Lili takes her hand back and placed it on her own chest.



Figure 10: Gerda touched Lili's hand but afterwards Lili took her hand back

My questions for this scene are:

1. Why do the filmmakers use see-through fabric? It could be for aesthetic purpose but there could also be some symbolic meanings in that choice. It could represent the

relationship between Lili and Gerda at that time. They can somehow see each other from their side of perspective, but there is certain vagueness in between.

2. Why does Lili take her hand back after Gerda touching it? Why is she afraid of showing affection to Gerda? As for Gerda's showing her affection, this will be discussed more in depth in the gender section. The way Lili pull back her hand was like she was frightened indicates that she is scared to have shown physical affection to Gerda.

It is clear that Lili loved Gerda, but again she was being affected by the heterosexual normative discourse; that is, she thought that to be a woman, she had to be a heterosexual woman. Examples of her thinking would be her flirting with Hans and her visits to Henrik's house (See Figure 11Figure 12). In order for Lili to feel like a woman, she has tried to experience heterosexual encounters with men, but the truth is that Henrik is a homosexual man and Hans does not like Lili in a romantic way. These two unsuccessful romantic endeavours may be the possible reason that Lili would like to try marriage with a man. This could also be her desire to experience with her female identity by trying out what a woman would do within the heterosexual normative discourse.



Figure 11: Lili flirting with Hans



Figure 12: Lili's visit to Henrik's house

4.3 Gender Theory in Explaining Lili's Gender Identity and Sexuality

In this section, I will apply Judith Butler's theories of gender and sexuality to explore the gender issues lying underneath Lili Elbe's identity. Butler (2007) explains how we see gender within the 'heterosexual matrix'. She then presents her readers with her own way of interpreting gender and sexuality. Both of these ways of explaining the body, gender and sexuality will be discussed with examples from *The Danish Girl*. Lili's gender identity can be explained with Butler's theory. The justifications of other people who disagree with Lili's decision of transgenderism can also be found within the heterosexual matrix. In addition to the explanations for Lili's controversial gender identity, I will also use Butler's gender theory to address to other characters' views on gender and sexuality and whose views are within the heterosexual matrix and those which are not.

The first part of this section will use expressions of gender to analyse how gender is presented in this film. In this particular discussion of gender expressions, the focus

will be on the visual codes contained in the costumes and objects (props) the characters were using as within the heterosexual matrix, clothes and objects are gendered.

The second part will focus on the gestures, tone and movements of the actors. Specifically speaking, Lili's imitation of movement resembles other women in the film. As for the discourse, one section that I found most interesting to discuss is the contradiction between Lili's view on gender and sexuality, and her own actions and desires.

Butler (2007) suggests that our idea of gender within the heterosexual matrix is a construction of the social and cultural context. She points out that when we see a gender, we also see its expressions. These expressions should fit into the social configuration of men and women's masculinity/femininity division. The expressions of gender to which she is referring are such things as women wearing dresses and men wearing trousers. That is to say, it is not only that people have to behave in certain ways within the rules and restrictions of the gender norms, but there are even rules for the items people use which means that inanimate objects are also gendered. It is true that when Einar first tries on the panty hose to pose in Ulla's place as Gerda's model for a painting, he feels a bit hesitant. This is an indication of panty hose is a female item and that men are not supposed to be wearing them under normal circumstances. These expressions of gender are not naturally inherited but rather constructed through social expectations and practises. Hence, the association of men with masculinity and women with femininity is the normative and more socially acceptable way of viewing gender, while this 'gender norm' is then normalised through repetition of practise that becomes habitual.

This repetition of practise is then developed into a clear-cut division of male with masculinity and female with femininity. That is to say, anything that is out of the men–masculine/women–feminine spectrum will be out of the ordinary. Therefore, to take transgender as an example in a world with a clear-cut gender norm, transgender would be seen as abnormal.

This kind of discourse not only matches some people’s belief in the world we live in now, it is also what most people in *The Danish Girl* believe in. It is heavily embedded in their everyday life and is presented in the film in the ways in which gender and sexuality is perceived by ordinary people.

4.3.1 How Sex, Gender and Sexuality are Perceived within the ‘Heterosexual Matrix’

Butler (2007) presents thought-provoking ways of interpreting gender through what she calls the ‘heterosexual matrix’. What exactly is the heterosexual matrix? What does it consist of? Before answering these questions, it should be noted that the heterosexual matrix has been the dominant discourse across much of the world now, as well as in the represented world of *The Danish Girl*.

Moreover, Butler (ibid) suggests that this discourse has been practised and normalised with repetition in social and cultural practises. Therefore, when someone acts differently to the heterosexual normative discourse, they would be seen as abnormal. Lili’s decision to surgically change her biological born ‘fixed’ sex was outside of the spectrum of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007).

In the heterosexual matrix, the body determines the sex which will be either male or female depending on the sexual organ. The sex of the said person would then be forced to comply to the gender that it is assigned to masculinity or femininity. The

gender would then have an effect on the sexuality of that person. Gauntlett (2008) has created an easy-to-comprehend figure below (See Figure 13). The arrows that are between each box indicates these boxes would have an effect on each other.

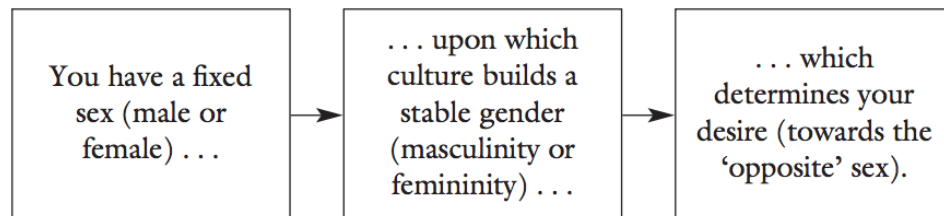


Figure 13: heterosexual matrix – sex, gender and sexuality

To apply this to Lili: judging the sexual organ with which she was born, Lili would be categorised as a male, while being a male would mean that ‘he’ had to perform his gender as a man and only behave and dress in a masculine manner. According to the last box in the figure, ‘his’ sexual preference would have to be women.

However, what was described above does not match Lili’s situation at all. She does not belong to the heterosexual matrix. Interestingly, even after her transformation, her understanding of gender and sexuality is still under the influence of the heterosexual matrix.

In other words, she believes that in order for her to perform a female gender, she has to like men, which is why in the beginning of her discovering her identity, she has a relationship with Henrik. For Lili, the secret relationship with Henrik was for her to feel more like a woman rather than have romantic feelings for him. For Henrik, who is a homosexual man, he is seeking Einar in that relationship instead of looking at Lili.

However, there is no way to provide an exact explanation to her actions. One can only speculate and try to create meaning with the existing discourse. Feasibly, Lili's perception of gender and sexuality are based on the binary construct that only consists of male and female. Nonetheless, this binary division of gender is not suitable for interpretation of Lili's gender identity and desire.

Similar to the heterosexual normative discourse's interpretation of body (in Figure 13), gender and sexuality, Lili's belief is that becoming a 'real' woman requires having the body of a woman (ibid). Hence, Lili's journey to becoming a woman first involves performing the expressions of women and then having a body of a woman. All of these moves are within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007). Gerda, on the other hand, has a different understanding with Lili's/Einar's identity. It is true that at first, her and Einar both fall into the rules and constraints to follow the gender norms of the heterosexual normative discourse. This means that they both abide by the rules of performing gender expressions within the heterosexual matrix.

However, in the final part of the film, she says to Lili while the two are in bed chatting about Lili's possibility of getting married with a man in the future. Gerda says with nostalgia that it was not long ago that the two were married. Lili corrects her and says that it was 'Einar' and Gerda who were married. Gerda responds softly stating that she knew it was Einar and her, but really it was 'you and me'.

From this short conversation, it is clear that Gerda is still in love with Lili, no matter the gender. This demonstrates that 1. Gerda believes that identity is fluid and can be changed 2. She understands that gender and sexuality are not linked together. To have a gender does not mean to have a correspondent sexuality and that gender and sexuality are two separated things that cannot exist on their own. Perhaps Gerda's

understanding of identity is hence closer to non-binary division of gender, which is closer to Butler's interpretation of gender and sexuality.

4.3.2 Becoming Lili

The film presents viewers with a clear-cut time for Lili's identity to emerge. On one hand, the exact time period of her discovering her female identity is clear. However, on the other hand, her journey of positioning herself and making sense of her identity is rather complicated and tangled up because, during her discovery and identity reconstruction, she has to face the obstacles of fighting against the heterosexual normative discourse with which she is familiar.

The trigger of the emergence of Lili's female identity would be the time when Gerda asks Einar to model in the place of Ulla Paulson for her painting. Ulla is Einar and Gerda's mutual friend, a ballet dancer who needs her picture that Gerda is working on displayed for her show. When filling in for Ulla, Einar is asked to put on a panty hose and high-heeled slippers at first, but Gerda then decides that ambience is not enough and asks Einar to cover himself with the dress and posed femininely as Ulla would have.

Before Gerda even suggests that Einar put on the dress, Einar interrupted her and says he would not put on the dress for her. Einar feels reluctant to put on 'a girl's' dress, so he expresses his unwillingness bluntly to Gerda. In this, it is apparent that men and dresses are not in the same category within the norm of 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 2007).

There are two gestures/movements that should be highlighted in this scene. The first is Einar putting on the panty hose, where his movement is gentle and slow as if he is enjoying the moment. The second and more significant one is Einar covering himself

with the dress, where the filmmakers do a POV (point of view) shot of his gaze at his right leg wearing the panty hose while stretching out femininely. The camera then has a sudden swift of focus shifting from the leg to the dress as Einar's breathing became heavier. There is then an extreme close up shot of his right hand touching and feeling the fabric of the dress while he carries on with his slight panting. By the focus of camera on his gaze, hand movements and facial expression, the filmmakers were trying to tell the audiences that Einar is feeling something differently. It is excitement and joy that Einar was feeling. He enjoys dressing in women's clothes which would be the 'expressions' of women (ibid). In fact, this first experience of dressing like a woman and posing as a woman was the start of Lili's appearance.

Throughout her transformation of truly becoming who she feels she is, Lili conducts her identity as a woman not only by dressing, walking and moving but also talking and thinking like a woman. Similar to what actors do when they study a character, they not only dress the part in order to have a more convincing performance, they will learn how the characters talk, move, think and respond, and this is what Butler (2007) refers to as 'performing a gender'.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler quotes Simone de Beauvoir in her prose, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one." This statement is an implication of gender being socially constructed and not naturally possessed (ibid). Lili is learning to become a woman by observing and mimicking how the women in her life are behaving within the social construct. In addition, it is said that gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance and of a natural sort of being (ibid).

Therefore, it is important for Lili to keep up with her life as Lili and leave the life of Einar, the husband of Gerda and the successful painter behind. Hall (2000) also points out that to become one identity would be to leave a former identity behind. Perhaps these arguments can shed some light on the possible reason for Lili to leave all her former identities behind, including her painter self, her role as Gerda's husband and her identity as Einar.

It is clear that for Lili it is not enough just to be able to perform her gender as a woman. Performing the expressions of a gender alone is not enough for her. Her ultimate goal is to fix her physical appearance through surgery which Butler (2007) referred to as 'the fixed sex' or the body. In doing so, it is clear that her view on gender and sexuality does not fit into queer theory. Her understanding is within the heterosexual matrix and it seems as if Lili's desire of having a female body, comes from her 'socially constructed' idea of a binary nature of sex (Butler, 2007).

4.3.3 The Fundamental Idea of Queer Theory: Butler's Way of seeing Body, Gender and Sexuality

As mentioned in the earlier section, Butler's theory of viewing gender disagrees with the 'heterosexual matrix'. Her theory provides a different way of looking at gender and sexuality. Queer theory is derived from her ideas about gender, but what exactly is her idea of gender? Butler (2007) disagrees with using the sexual organ to determine sex. According to her theory, the idea of a binary division of sex – male and female - is a social construct developed by medical discourse.

However, she also argues that there are more than just 2 sexes. Her argument here focuses on the existence of 'hermaphrodites' – people who are born with 2 kinds of

sexual organs. Hermaphrodites cannot be determined to be male or female simply judged by sexual organs.

Hence, Butler's way of viewing gender and sexuality is simply to state that we have a body. According to her, not only gender, but the determination of sex based on sexual organs is also a social construct. The figure below is also made by Gaunlett (2008) to help readers understand Butler's idea better. It is important to note that, in this figure, there are no arrows pointing to any directions (See Figure 14) which means that these three traits are separate and they exist on their own. They do not affect one another.

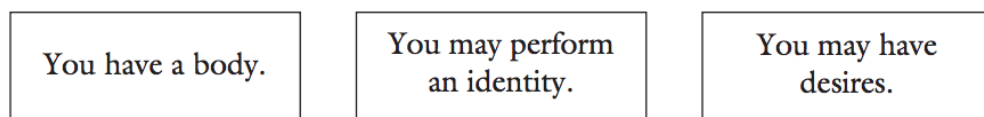


Figure 14: Butler's way of interpreting body, gender and sexuality

This idea of viewing gender and sexuality is ground-breaking. Even though near the end of the film, Lili stops showing physical or verbal affection to Gerda, as an audience analyst, I would argue that she still has love for Gerda and Gerda loved Lili back regardless of the gender. As discussed in earlier sections, at the end, Gerda's understanding of gender and sexuality are closer to queer theory than Lili's understandings.

Hence, Butler's theory fits more with Gerda's beliefs near the end of the movie when she says to Lili that it is "You and me" who were married rather than saying that was Einar and Gerda who were married.

Butler proposes to challenge and subvert this traditional view of gender by causing 'gender trouble'. She also states that gender is not an attribute we own since birth, but rather something that is learned and taught later in life. In *The Danish Girl*, after realising her identity as a woman, Lili repeatedly states that the body she was born with is not her body. In order to truly feel like herself, the only way for her is to change her physical appearance to make her identity and physical appearance coherent. It is her goal to remove the male genitalia and have a female reproductive organ instead. Even after deciding to pursue her female identity, Lili's understanding of gender falls into the traditional outlook of 'binary division' that consists only of male and female (Butler, 2003).

Lili's own belief in gender and sexuality contradicts her real situation, but her situation could be explained using Butler's theory. Here, Lili believes that for herself to be a gender is to have a certain sexuality (ibid). Furthermore, she believes that she has to change her body to truly feel like herself. However, the fact is that she loves Gerda and does not have a heterosexual romance to feel more like a woman or even change her body to become a woman.

It is interesting to think how she might have behaved if she were not under the influence of heterosexual normative discourse. If the dominant discourse were queer discourse and she were to have knowledge that her body, her female identity and her desire could be separated, what difference would it make? One could argue that Lili seems to have romantic feelings for Hans. What about the signs that suggest Lili likes men too? Lili's desire for men does not contradict with her desire for women. Nevertheless, Lili's insistence on performing her female identity still conveys the idea of having to like men in order to be a woman. However, paradoxically she

challenges the gender norm by undergoing her sexual reassignment surgery, she tries at the same time to fit herself into the heterosexual feminine norm.

For example, there is love between Lili and Gerda. In the beginning of the film when Lili first starts wearing Gerda's nightgown, they are having frequent and passionate sexual intercourse. It is not until later when Lili becomes more determined about being a 'woman' when the sexual intercourse between them has stopped.

Another proof of it would be Lili kissing Gerda on her lips right before she leaves on the train for her second surgery. She fails to understand that it is not who (what gender) we love that determines our identity. The two are separate and they do not contradict with one another. One can be a woman and love a woman. In her case, one can be born as male and self-identify as female and still fall in love with female. Butler (ibid, p. 33-34) indicates that:

This text continues, then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalised and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexists power, to make *gender trouble*, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.

Interestingly, her desire and people for whom she feels affection does not, in my opinion, fit with her own classification. While she is undergoing the process of becoming herself, it is clear that she is following the traditional (stereotypical) constraints of gender roles. Her desire to feel like a woman has driven her to experience things like kissing a man – Henrik Sandahl, who is a homosexual man. Why is it that Lili feels the need to comply to the feminine norm while transforming

into a woman? There should be some psychological explanation to the question, but that aspect shall be left undiscussed in this tiny piece of research.

Another thing that adds into complexity of her identification is her marriage with Gerda Wegner. Not only is there a certain of complexity in Einar/Lili's gender, but her sexuality is also argumentative. There is love between her and Gerda, but perhaps her pursuit of becoming a woman stands in the way of her having a physical/sexual relation with Gerda.

4.3.4 The Expression of Gender: Gendered Objects for Certain Gender

In this section, the analysis will circulate around the objects that are gendered within the heterosexual matrix. The first object that is worth discussing is the clothing people wear. When we shop for clothes, there are men's clothing and women's clothing, although there is also 'unisex' clothing; the name 'unisex' suggests that clothes are gendered and this is for all the sexes.

As mentioned earlier, Butler (2007) explains that the gender we see is actually the expressions that are taught to us socially and performed. Therefore, one will have to select the 'appropriate' gendered clothing to match with the appropriate performance. In the beginning of the movie, when Einar is modelling in Ulla's place for Gerda's painting, he refuses to put on Ulla's dress. 'Dresses' are worn by women. Some might argue that for some cultures, men wear dresses/skirts too. For example, in Scotland, men wear kilts. This would be one of the rare exceptions. However, in most cultures, dresses connote femininity. That is why earlier in the film, before Einar accept his transgendered self, he was reluctant to put on the dress. A pantyhose has a rather significant role to the film too. In the scene where Einar modelled for Gerda, he agrees to put on Ulla's panty hose, but he gets it wrong for

the first attempt. However, afterwards, when Gerda and Einar have decided to dress Einar up as Lili to attend to Artist's Ball, Einar has learned the correct way to put on a pantyhose.

Now, moving on to the next object, the night dress. Gerda has bought a new night dress and Einar complimented her on it. Einar is sexually aroused when he sees Gerda in that new night dress and that night, the two engage in heated intercourse. Even though at this point, the identity of Lili had not fully emerged, it is clear that Einar has sexual desires for Gerda.

If we apply Butler's theory of sexuality here, it would fit perfectly, as the performed gender does not have an effect on the person's sexuality. It would be explicable that Einar or even Lili has a desire towards Gerda. My argument is that Lili does have desire for Gerda, but her desire is oppressed because she is hyper-concentrating on the performance of Lili. Moreover, she believes that to be a certain gender, one will have to have desire for the opposite sex.

This is also interesting because she knows and accepts Henrik as a homosexual man, but she fails to connect the dots that she herself could perform a female gender and have the desire to be female at the same time.

4.3.5 Performative gender: the expression of feminine gestures and movements

As Butler (2007, p.25) indicates, 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of be gender; ... identity is performatively constructed by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'. Gauntlett (2008) takes Butler's idea of gender then concludes that gender, then, is a *performance* – and nothing more. In other words, Butler is suggesting that our behaviour is not influenced by gender identity, but it is rather gender here that is the behaviour which is itself constituted by culture.

Therefore, while Lili is trying to build her gender identity as a woman, she knows nothing else than to follow society's mode of gender norms. She puts on a wig, some makeup and a dress. She talks with a softer voice and walks in shorter steps with her legs crossed.



Figure 15: performing Einar

Judith Butler (2007) argues that gender is not assigned by birth but rather something people later learn to become. In the case of the transformation of Einar into Lili, there is a scene when Lili dresses like Einar to see an erotic performance (See Figure 16). Einar says to Gerda that when she is Einar, she feels as if she is performing as herself when she was performing to be a man instead. It is also worth noting the irony that when she is Lili, she is also performing her female gender. The gender identity she self-identified with and chooses is again performative. Her female self is still under the constraints and rules that have been made and normalised over time by society.



Figure 16: Einar goes to see a peek show to mirror the movements of the performer

Through Lili's training whether it was taught by Gerda or self-trained, she is learning the 'expression' of women (Butler, 2007); for instance, learning to walk like a woman before going to the party and observing women's hand gestures in fish market (See Figure 17Figure 20).



Figure 17: Gerda teaching Einar how to walk like a woman



Figure 18: Einar observing and mimicking a woman's hand gesture at a fish market while Gerda is looking at Einar in the back



Figure 19: Lili (still identified as Einar at the time) practicing to walk in high heel shoes for Lili's first public appearance at the Artists' Ball



Figure 20: At the Artists' Ball, Lili observing and learning the behaviour of woman while sitting by the dance floor

When Lili starts to work in the perfume store in Paris, all the other girls tease her that how could she eat all the macarons and still have the tiniest bum. This statement would contain quite a lot of female perspective. First, women constantly compare themselves to one another, especially appearance wise. Most women don't feel good about how they look like and will always envy or be jealous of other women's body. Where does this self-consciousness of the female body come from?

Second, there is the implication of what kind of body type is considered 'beautiful'; in this case, they appreciate slim figure. Lili answers this question with wit, saying that the trick is to eat nothing else.

Even though, Lili did not agree that her identity as Lili was wrong or abnormal. She later on explains and tells other people that her male body is a mistake/sickness that needs to be corrected. The conversation with Henrik takes place after her first surgery. Henrik asks, "So what you're suggesting is that, uh, a doctor... intervened" "To correct a mistake in nature", Lili replied.

Hence, Henrik carries on with surprise and a hint of doubt in his tone, “He made you a woman.” Lili replies, “No, God made me a woman, but the doctor is curing me of the sickness that was my disguise.” “A real woman,” Henrik concluded with exclamation.

In the end of the movie, after Lili’s second and final surgery, she wakes up and says, “I am entirely myself”. All of the things that Lili says here are a straightforward sign of her believing in the rules and constitutions of the heterosexual normative discourse. In her mind, to ‘really’ become a woman is to have the body of a woman. Another part worth highlighting is that before Lili passes over, she was sitting in the garden during sunset.

Lili tells Gerda that she had the most beautiful dream last night. “Last night, I had the most beautiful dream. I dreamed that I was a baby in my mother’s arms. And she looked down at me... And she called me ‘Lili’” This showed her desire of other people to recognise her gender. This could also be the reason for her insistence on performing her female self and to do the surgery so that she could have a female body. This is the heterosexual normative way of viewing her identity. Moreover, the heterosexual normative discourse was the dominant one. Therefore, to have most people in that world really recognise her female self, she tried to fit into this discourse.

4.3.6 Subversion of Gender

Lili is the protagonist of the film and the star of the story. Her decision to change her identity is pioneering, but did her action have an impact on the subversion of gender? Through the entire identity transition, Lili is courageous enough to challenge the society’s normative perspective of gender by cross-dressing. However, she isn’t

satisfied with temporal identity change. It was Gerda who has looked beyond socially constructed gender and just love Lili as a person.

In the conversation when Lili and Gerda were discussing Lili's possibility of getting married with a man, Gerda recalls that the two of them were married not long ago, but Lili responds, "You and Einar". Gerda replies in turn that, "I know it was Einar, but really, it was you and me". Through this, the audiences has a sense of how Gerda felt about Lili. Gerda loves Lili/Einar despite her gender identity because she is able to surpass the constraints of heterosexual or any kind of socially acceptable normative love and love Lili as a person.

Gerda has stayed and taken care of Lili during her two surgeries and look after her all through the transition out of love. Her love for Lili is the exact practice of Butler's (2007) theory to cause 'gender trouble' and to challenge the norm.

5. Conclusion

Even though there seem to be an increase in the exposure of diversified sexuality in media representations over recent years, the situation has not yet to reach the point of normalisation or at least non-biased. *The Danish Girl* is a well-made film representation that is about a transgender woman's life story. As Butler (2007) suggested, gender norms should be challenged and subverted and perhaps having films about challenging the gender norms such as *The Danish Girl* would be a form of subversion. Lili's identity and gender was complex and interesting to investigate. To look into the possible causes that may have an impact on her identity, discourse analysis was employed (Foucault, 1977). In this study, it was discovered that even a queer person as pioneering as Lili herself was still under the influence of the

dominant heterosexual normative discourse while she was re-constructing her identity. As paradoxical as identity itself, Lili's reconstruction of her identity is also considerably paradoxical (Hall, 2000). While Lili was re-constructing her gender identity, she was fighting and at the same time complying to the heterosexual normative discourse.

For years, people around the world have been immersed in the dominant heterosexual normative discourse. The alternative to heterosexuals, i.e., LGBTQ+, has yet to be deemed as normal or natural universally or wholly. Will it ever reach the point where all sexuality could be seen as normal and natural? The answer to this question would be left for the future to discover.

However, what should be done now is for the media content creators to make more nuanced and non-distorted representations of queerness so that viewers could be more accustomed with queer representations without seeing them as the odd one out. Limitations of this research: the analysis and interpretation of scenes could be biased as they are based on my personal feeling and interpretation of the work. Other people might not feel the same way or perhaps would interpret the meaning much differently. The theories and examples that are discussed in this study are all from Western media and culture because the analytic target is *The Danish Girl* which is also a product of Western media.

Nonetheless, by focusing on the Western media and culture by no means dismisses the importance of Eastern media and culture. It is simply a matter of space and focus. The examples that are given in this thesis are mostly mainstream television show and films, but there are also some independent films included in the discussion. This thesis does not include audience analysis and all the interpretation of the text would be based on my personal opinion and observation.

It would be interesting to see what would have happened if queer theory had existed back when Lili started to explore her identity. Would her and Gerda's relationship have turned out differently? This study could be at help with media content makers who aims to create more nuanced and non-stereotypical representation of queerness.

References

Bordwell, D. & Thomson, C. (2001). *Film art: An introduction*. 6th ed. McGraw-Hill: London.

Bristowe, K. and Harris, P. (2014). *Michel Foucault: discourse in the modern medical consultation*. *Medical Education*, 48(6), pp.552-553.

Burn, A (2013) 'The Kineikonic mode: towards a Multimodal Theory of the Moving Image'. A working paper for the MODE NCRM node in multimodal methodologies (a shorter version also published as a chapter in Jewitt, C (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (2nd edition). London: Routledge (2013).

Butler, J. (2000). *Critically Queer* in *Identity: a reader*. London: Sage.

Butler, J. (2007). *Gender Trouble*. Routledge.

C, Jones. (2012) Lesbian and gay cinema. In Nelmes, J. (eds) *Introduction to Film Studies*. London: Routledge.

Chan, K. (2013). *Bad Boys Need Love, Too: The Cinematic Negativity of Gay Romance in I love you Phillip Morris* in *Queer Love in Film and Television Critical essays*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Cook, P. (2007). *The Cinema Book*. 3rd ed. London: BFI.

- Demory, P. and Pullen, C. (2013). Introduction in *Queer love in film and television. Critical essays*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Derrida, J. (2000). *Difference in Identity: a reader*. London: Sage.
- Dyer, R. (2012). *Heavenly Bodies*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality*. Vol. 3. London: Penguin Books Lt
- Gauntlett, D. (2008). *Media, Gender and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Halberstam, J. (2006). *In a Queer Time and Place*. Enskede: TPB.
- Hall, S. (2000). *Who needs 'identity'?* in *Identity: a reader*. London: Sage.
- Hall, S., Evans, J. and Nixon, S. (2013). *Representation*. London: Sage.
- Hicks, J. (2013). "Can I Get an 'Amen'?: Marginalised communities and Self-love on RuPaul's Drag Race in Queer love in Film and Television Critical essays. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Izod, J. (1987). *Reading the screen*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- J, Nelmes. (2012) Gender and film. In Nelmes, J. (eds) *Introduction to Film Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Lapsley, R. and Westlake, M. (1992). *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Miller, J. (2012). *Crossdressing cinema: An analysis of transgender representation in film*. M.A. University of Arkansas.
- Monaco, J. (2007). *How to read a Film*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. *Screen*, 16(3), pp.6-18.
- Phillips, J. (2006). *Transgender on screen*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ritcher, N. (2013). *Trans Love in New Trans Cinema*. in *Queer Love in Film and Television Critical essays*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Salamon, G. (2010). *Assuming a body*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Sefton-Green, Julian (2005). '*Timelines, Timeframes and Special Effects: software and creative media production*', *Education, Communication & Information*,5:1,99 - 110

Stacey, J. (2007). *Queer Theory and New Queer Cinema* in *The Cinema Book*. 3rd ed. London: BFI.

Stam, R. (2000). *Film Theory*. Malden (Mass.): Blackwell publ.

Storey, J. (2015). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. 7th ed. NY: Routledge.