Kent Academic Repository
Full text document (pdf)

Citation for published version

Bolsover, Nicola (2015) Costume and Cross-Dressing in Stand-up Comedy.   Master of Arts by Research (MARes) thesis, University of Kent,.

DOI

Link to record in KAR

https://kar.kent.ac.uk/52927/

Document Version

UNSPECIFIED

Kent Academic Repository
Full text document (pdf)

Citation for published version

Bolsover, Nicola (2015) Costume and Cross-Dressing in Stand-up Comedy. Master of Arts by Research (MARes) thesis, University of Kent,.

DOI

Link to record in KAR

http://kar.kent.ac.uk/52927/

Document Version

UNSPECIFIED

Costume & Cross-Dressing in Stand-Up Comedy

Its effects on the comedian and the presented persona of the comedian

Nicola Bolsover

MA by PaR

nb328@kent.ac.uk

Table of Contents

Introduction

About Nicola Bolsover

I started performing stand-up comedy in late 2008, as part of my degree at the University of Kent, along with nine other budding comics. We spent three months honing our craft in front of the friendly audiences in one of the campus bars, before being sent into the wider world of stand-up to try our best five-minutes of material on the circuit. My first year on the circuit was a lot of fun and I was met with a degree of success, being booked by several comedy club promoters, and reaching the final of the Chortle Student Comedian Competition 2009. That same year I participated in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and have taken shows up there every year since. 2015 will be my sixth year as writer, producer and host of comedy panel show, *Quiz in my Pants*. The show is predominantly based at the festival, but I have taken it to Canterbury, and to London regularly. I have also continued performing stand-up, mostly in London and Canterbury, and other towns in the South East.

My style of performance is unique: I wear hand-knitted jumpers and talk enthusiastically about certain obsessions of mine, interspersed with relevant anecdotes and the occasional `physical one-liner`. My material does not consist of many jokes, or gags (*Chortle*'s Steve Bennett used the word "undergagged" in a review[1]), but instead the humour comes from the way I talk, my physicality, and the way I see the world in which we live. This is a common approach in today's stand-up; the public expect a more autobiographical performance from a `real` person, not least because the wealth of comedians nowadays means more competition between them. As Patrick Marber says,

> "I think in the olden days material was a movable feast in a sense because comics were much less a persona and much more about gags [...] The modern lot are much more concerned with projecting a notion of personality, of: This is my view of the world, this is my little angle on life [...]Because they have to find something that makes them distinct [...] quite a lot of it now is about image. You have to, in a short space of time, project what your selling point is, your angle [...] People need a pitch now"

---

[1] Bennett for *Chortle*

Nicola Bolsover   nb328@kent.ac.uk

(in Tushingham 1995: 96).

I tend to go onstage with only an outline for what I have planned, and see what happens. My great love for prankster Andy Kaufman has developed me into a comedian who likes to take risks and try out strange stunts that are often much funnier to me than they are to the audience.

My most popular set involves me discussing my ridiculous and eccentric plans for my impending spinster dotage, and me singing (speaking in rhythm) a song about my love for the actor Sean Bean, while playing an Egyptian drum which is tucked under my left arm ("a wonderfully-crafted piece of obsession"[2]). Other material includes an achingly long re-enactment of the service I once received in a cafe at a National Trust site, an enthusiastic account of my love of boy bands, and a bizarre dance to the theme tune of 1990s TV show *Quantum Leap*. My costume reflects the eclectic and eccentric nature of a lot of my material; at the time I started wearing it not many young women wore hand-knitted jumpers in public, nor do they openly confess their love of childish, geeky and nerdy things to rooms full of strangers. I use my costume to reinforce and identify my style and content; do other stand-ups do the same? Comics like Milton Jones, Harry Hill and Tony Law immediately come to mind as some who appear to have coordinated their costumes with their styles.

Costume in stand-up has interested me since I started performing. I was very conscious of what I chose to wear and what effect that might have on the audience and their perception of me. This, and my love of drag performance (brought about by watching drag in popular culture; Dame Edna Everage, Monty Python and *The Birdcage* are just a few examples of performances I was exposed to from childhood, prompting a fascination with the genre), led me to start researching within this area, and gave me a desire to experiment with different ways of appearing onstage. I wanted to know what effect different costumes would have on myself and the way I performed. My own stage costume is close to my heart, so how would I feel wearing something different onstage, and would it change the way I present my onstage persona?

In the run-up to my first gig I started thinking about what I should wear to perform. As a woman, I was aware of the trend for female comedians to dress androgynously, and my

---

[2] Dillon-Trenchard for *Den of Geek*

own clothing choices became a concern for me; I wanted to ensure my onstage clothes said what I wanted them to say about my onstage persona.

My own experiences of costume in stand-up performance would indicate that costume can, and should, relate to the comedian's presentation of `self` (whether that `self` is a character, a persona, or almost identical to the offstage `self`), and that it has an effect on the way the comedian feels, as a performer.

I went shopping to find something appropriate to wear, but interestingly found that the only things that appealed to me were things I would never normally have worn offstage; I did not want to look like my offstage self, I wanted to create a distinction between myself and my persona (this seems a contradiction against what I have said about my material being personal to me, but I have selected certain aspects of `myself` to create my onstage `persona`).

After a handful of gigs trialling different outfits, I started wearing my father's old short-sleeved shirts from the early 1990s, normally reserved for barbecues and summer holidays. They were boldly patterned, brightly coloured, and not at all flattering. I had a better notion of my stage persona by then – I was happy but highly-strung, silly, obsessive and eccentric – and I wanted my stage clothing to reflect that persona. I knew I wanted to wear a woolly Fair Isle patterned jumper (something that would be suitably unusual to draw attention, but not too obviously a stage costume), and was looking in charity shops and online, but I couldn't find one that suited my persona well – the colours were always too dark or dull. So I asked my mother to hand-knit a jumper and when I started wearing this Fair Isle jumper I found it had the desired result: I felt confident and less self-conscious, and I found it easier to convey my persona to the audience, as there was already a marker for my eccentricities before I even spoke. I knew that this costume worked well for me and started commissioning my mother for new jumpers. I now have a second Fair Isle jumper; one with *Tetris* shapes knitted on the torso and *Pacman* on the sleeves; one with knitted flaps covering pictures representing different holidays and festivals; and my favourite, which has characters from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* on it. The latter is the one I wear most because I feel it best reflects my persona: there is a strong suggestion of childishness and slight connotations of `geekiness`, which are true to my persona, and relevant to a great deal of my material. It is also the biggest of the jumpers and is so loose on me that the sleeves fall over my hands and the shape of my upper body cannot be seen. These are advantages to me because the latter means I am

less self-conscious about my body and so more confident, and the former helps to make me feel childish and so helps me `get into character`.

What I aim to explore

Name a funny and successful man who has dressed up as a woman. RuPaul, Robin Williams, David Walliams, Les Dawson, Danny LaRue; the list roles off the tongue. But reverse that premise and it might be a little tougher to name the women who get laughs while dressing as men. Around twenty years ago Kathy Burke appeared as the teenager Perry on *Harry Enfield and Chums*, then around ten years later Catherine Tate took on the role of an effeminate middle aged man. The examples are few and far between; why is there not an abundance of female comedians dressing up as men to get laughs? What are the taboos surrounding this medium and are they too significant to find a mainstream audience?

In this project I set out to discover what the performance benefits and pitfalls are of experimenting with cross-dressing and through that, notions of femininity. Is there a benefit to female performers allowing themselves the freedom to cross-dress? I decided to take on this challenge and see if I have the confidence, skills and versatility to dress as a man and still get a laugh. I wanted to know how it would make me as a performer feel, and the ongoing impact that experience would have on both my material and my confidence. Whatever my findings, can they be extrapolated to other comedians? And if so, how?

My focus will be on the experience of the *performer*, not on the experience of the audience. By experimenting with different forms of costuming, including using gendered clothing, I hope to find the effects costuming has on the performer and how s/he can use these effects to their advantage. Using a combination of performances from open mic nights and more formal, arranged shows, I want to explore a wide range of transvestite performance, from pure gender impersonation, through the parodying of gender and gender identities, to appearing as a fusion of genders or with no gender at all. My methodology will – like my stand-up performances – be led by instinct; reacting to each performance and the impact it has on my confidence, notions of self and delivery of my material. I hope to find that these all gain me insights into the potential of a type of

performance in which I have no experience. Initially in this project I will draw on the critical theory and historical analysis of comedy and cross-dressing. I will then go on to outline my personal experiences while performing in costume, and then conclude by bringing the threads of theory and practice together, analysing the benefit this experience had on my performance, and potentially the impact the same journey could have on others.

The Comedian

Comedian as outsider

No matter their style or appearance, all comedians are set apart from the audience; they are an outsider. They have set themselves apart by standing on a stage before an audience, on their own.

The comedian Stewart Lee has noted that "all the great comedians are kind of outsider figures, commenting on society from outside" (2010: 99). It is this outsider status that gives the comedian the licence to comment on society, without the same risk of censure had they said it from a position among the audience. The reaction they get can affirm their outsider status or earn them a higher status; "The comedian confronts the audience with his or her personality and wins celebration - the highest form of acceptance - or is scorned and rebuffed as a pitiable outsider" (Marc 1989: 12).

For many comedians the outsider status is something they feel in their everyday life, not just when they are onstage. In an interview with Double, comic Rhona Cameron said, "I think [stand-up is] an organic thing, and I think it comes from a kind of crossroads of life, or a feeling that…you've never fitted in or you haven't got along with others" (Double 2005: 3). Many comedians take the elements of themselves that set them apart and use them onstage to help establish their status as an outsider. They could be overweight, have particularly large ears, have a lisp, for example. "Traditionally, the comedian is defective in some way, but his natural weaknesses generate pity, and more important, exemption from the expectation of normal behavior. He is thus presented to his audience as marginal […] This marginality, however, also allows for a fascinating ambiguity and ambivalence" (Mintz 1985: 74). I know that I had trouble fitting in when I was young, and that I used my sense of humour to help me make friends. It is even possible that I learnt to be funny so I could make friends, and so I could gain the acceptance that I now gain onstage.

One of the elements of stand-up comedy that sets it apart from other art forms is the direct address to the audience, the lack of the fourth wall. As most performances use the

fourth wall, stand-ups are creating an ambiguity, unsettling the audience's understanding of theatrical conventions. As Marc puts it: "The stand-up's refusal to respect sharp distinctions between the play world and the real world results in the violation of a primary convention of Western theater. The audience is explicitly asked *not* to suspend its disbelief" (1989:17). By breaking through the fourth wall and setting themself apart from the audience, "the joker [...] is one of those people who pass beyond the bounds of reason and society and give glimpses of a truth which escapes though [sic] the mesh of structured concepts" (Douglas 1970: 159). This gives the comedian power, and s/he can use that power to "provide us with some of our most valuable social commentary" (Mintz 1985: 77). In Mintz's article he examines the role of the comedian in society: "[stand-up comedy] confronts just about all of the profoundly important aspects of our culture and our society, and that it seems to have an important role allowing for expression of shared beliefs and behavior, changing social roles and expectations" (1985: 80). It is this `expression of changing social roles and expectations` that is particularly interesting for this project. It is as though comedians are granted more liberties than the `normal` person, and with these liberties they can influence opinions and cause change. Mintz summarises just how great the comedian's role in society is:

> "He represents conduct to be ridiculed and rejected, and our laughter reflects our superiority, our relief that his weaknesses are greater than our own [...] Yet to the extent that we may identify with his expression or behavior, secretly recognize it as reflecting natural tendencies in human activity if not socially approved ones, or publically affirm it under the guise of "mere comedy," or "just kidding," he can become our *comic spokesman*. In this sense, as a part of the public ritual of standup comedy, he serves as a *shaman*, leading us in a celebration of a community of shared culture, of homogenous understanding and expectation.
>
> The oldest, most basic role of the comedian is precisely this role of *negative exemplar*"

(1985: 74-5)

Female Comedians

If all comedians are outsiders, female comedians like me are even more so. This is because women have historically held a lower status in society than men, and also because female comedians are rarer than male comedians, making them a minority within stand-up comedy[3], and raising their status as an outsider. Unfortunately, they are also considered outsiders within comedy because often women are considered to be less funny than men.[4]

Because men have traditionally a higher societal status then women it is easier for them to play the clown, or as Peacock says in her book about clowns, "to play the clown means giving away status. Status is only readily given away by those whose status in society is secure" (2009: 78). Thus it is rare for a woman to give away the status she has. Banks & Swift support this view: "Because women have had very little real status in society, it has been difficult for them to adopt the mock inferiority of the clown" (1987: 112). This latter comment is dated, as it was written almost thirty years ago, and the situation of women's status in comparison to men's will have changed. Peacock does not directly state that it is women that can't give away their status, but she does offer another reason for why we see fewer female clowns than male clowns:

> "Annie Fratellini suggested that the dearth of women clowns could be put down to women's reluctance to make themselves look ugly, and this may be the case, although many comic character actresses seem happy to do this (Julie Waters, Jennifer Saunders, Joanna Lumley). Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that when actresses make themselves look ugly, they do so to perform a character distinct from themselves "
>
> (2009: 78).

Germaine Greer reinforces Peacock's notion, that "One of the real problems about women in comedy is narcissism. You've got to be prepared to make yourself look ridiculous, and lots of women find that very difficult to do" (in Banks & Swift 1987: 196).

It is vital to acknowledge the position of women in stand-up comedy. As I am a woman and cannot know any other perspective, the results from this project will be far more applicable to other women than to men. Also, the outsider status of the comedian is

---

[3] Benedictus for *The Guardian Online*
[4] Burnett for *The Guardian Online*

what grants them comedic licence, and women, as a minority in stand-up, have greater marginal status, which in theory would grant them more comedic licence.

Women dressing androgynously

Maeve Murphy suggests that "perhaps the myth of women not being as funny as men was due to the fact that they were just trying to imitate a style more suited to men than women" (in Banks & Swift 1987: 202). Whether or not stand-up is a style more *suited* to men is a moot point. We know that in terms of numbers, the world of stand-up is dominated by men, from performers to agents, bookers, and historically the audience. So women have been imitating a style dominated by men, or at least this was the case in 1987. Imitation doesn't necessarily mean appropriating the clothes of men, but certainly in the alternative comedy era with comedians like Jo Brand and Victoria Wood, that was the trend. Now this is not so common, with women like Katherine Ryan, Roisin Conaty and Sarah Millican frequently appearing on television in feminine clothing, their faces made-up and hair coiffed.

Double also theorises that "[s]tand-up comedy has historically been male-dominated, and this has led a number of female comedians to adopt an androgynous look" (2005: 93), that women often dress androgynously to fit in to a male domain. He goes on to quote Jo Brand, who is an example of a female comedian who is known for dressing androgynously:

> "For her too, the choice was affected by the sexual politics of comedy clubs, where most of the acts and most of the hecklers are men: `I must say that I felt all the black stuff, it was easy, it was kind of slightly androgynous, and I suppose I kind of always felt that, particularly sort of being a female that the less you drew attention to what sex you were, if you were a woman, the easier it would be in some ways, you know`"

> (Double 2005: 93).

Jenny Lecoat is an interesting example of a female comedian who moved from dressing androgynously to adopting a more feminine style. Her career started in 1982, and "she strode onto the stage in a man-scaring uniform of cropped hair and bovver boots

complete with a badge bearing the legend: `Exploited`" (Double 1997: 200). By 1987 her costume had changed, due to some advice:

> "A woman [...] said: `You're giving too much away when you come on.  As soon as people look at you they know what they're going to get.  Have you thought about confusing them a bit?  If you came on in something quite feminine and quite pretty, it'd be much more interesting.` "
>
> (Jenny Lecoat in Banks & Swift 1987: 28).

So Lecoat's onstage image changed from something that complemented her material, to something that contrasted her material.

Being told what to wear

Victoria Wood is most frequently seen dressing androgynously, and in Banks & Swift we find that she had been put under pressure to change the way she dressed: "They used to say to me `You've got to wear a dress.` And I said `but I hate wearing dresses.  Please don't make me wear a dress.` And they said, `No, you've got to.` And so I did, 'cos I thought I had to do what they wanted me to do." (Victoria Wood in Banks & Swift 1987: 87). It is quite clear here that Wood's choice to wear trousers is a personal choice because she hates wearing dresses, not a conscious decision to do with her presentation onstage. What is interesting is that she felt pressure from external parties about what she wore onstage, but not about any other aspect of her work; "I've just done what I wanted. Nobody's ever wanted me to do anything different. The only pressure I've ever felt was about what I should wear. Nobody's ever tried to change the material" (Victoria Wood in Banks & Swift 1987: 220).

Often, when appearing on television, comedians have less choice over what they can wear. Producers and promoters ask acts to wear something suitable to the TV show rather than something suitable to their act. George Carlin, for example, went through a change in his style (both style of material and style of dress) that ended with him dressed in a more beatnik style and using material that reflected his presented alternative lifestyle. Carlin appeared on the first *Saturday Night Live* and reportedly caused an argument over his costume, when "[t]he network insisted that Carlin wear a suit and tie on the air; Carlin wanted to wear a T-shirt. After a blowup just before dress rehearsal,

they finally compromised on a suit jacket over a T-shirt" (Zoglin 2008: 36). For Arthur Smith, the network's desire for control went beyond just his outfit:

> "*Paramount City* was awful for me. I was really miserable during that, for a whole heap of reasons. They wanted to make me Mr BBC1. They dressed me up in clothes that I felt uncomfortable in, and the clothes were a symptom of the whole thing. I had people at every level doctoring my material, until I lost all confidence in what I was doing there"
>
> (in Cook 1994: 258).

What this shows is that sometimes there are external factors that affect what a comedian wears, and that sometimes there is also pressure to change material as well as costume, especially when appearing on television.

In *Getting the Joke*, Double uses Al Lubel as an example of someone whose costume changes between TV appearances, from watching a 1992 documentary:

> "we see him performing at a comedy club in Vegas. He's wearing comfortable clothes: a T-shirt under his jacket, and trainers. His delivery is just as comfortable: he's relaxed and in control, as if talking to friends. Towards the end of the film, we see his Carson spot. He's transformed. His clothing is neat and formal, his T-shirt replaced by a smart white shirt and a tie. His delivery is taut and keen [...] he smiles too much"
>
> (2005: 50).

What is clear here is that Lubel is more comfortable wearing a T-shirt, jacket and trainers, and that when he is less comfortable it affects his delivery.

This all shows a clear connection between the costume of the comedian and the comfort they experience. This does not mean a physical comfort, but there is a comfort that is present when there is a resonance between the appearance of the comedian and the presented persona of the comedian. So when a comic is forced to change their appearance by external factors, a dissonance is created that affects both the presentation of persona and the actual performance.

Effect of costume on performer

Comfort is an important element of any performer's stage costume, and this is true for stand-up comedians as well. How one feels physically can affect the performance, and this may have been the case for Al Lubel during his Carson spot. Certain clothes will restrict movement while others will allow or even encourage it.

Ross Noble, Phill Jupitus and Rhys Darby have all been used as evidence of comedians whose choice of comfortable shoes allows them to be more active onstage (Double 2005: 95). Phill Jupitus suggested that changing his footwear changed the way he performed; he says that changing from heavy boots to plimsolls improved his performance: "It did feel different, yeah, it just felt that you could scamper a little bit more [...] Whereas with the boots, you'd stomp" (Double 2005: 95).

For women (and some men) the choice of high heels or flat shoes has a similar effect, if not greater, as wearing high heels affects the posture of the whole body. Physical comedians like Lee Evans would not be able to wander round the stage as much if they were wearing high heels, let alone run. The heels would impact their whole posture, affecting the image the audience would see.

Certain clothes can be restrictive, too. A corset, for example, leaves the wearer unable to move their torso normally, and also makes it difficult for them to breathe properly. For the women of Restoration and Victorian theatre, the `breeches roles` gave them freedom from their usual restrictive attire: "there was no denying that breeches on actresses afforded [...] freedom of movement unavailable to women encumbered by voluminous skirts and petticoats" (Senelick 2000: 260).

We have so far examined the physical effects of costume on the performer, but there are also psychological effects to be taken into consideration. My own choice of usual stage costume was in part to avoid any judgement that might come from wearing my own clothes onstage. As a woman I am accustomed to being judged on my clothing choices, but "the exposure of the stand-up comic to public judgment is extraordinarily raw and personal" (Marc 1989:14), so when I appear onstage I want to limit the amount of judgement under which I put myself. By wearing clothes that are not the clothes of my offstage self I can avoid personal judgement and become more relaxed.

An unintentional by-product of my stage costume is to help me get into my stage persona. I found this out recently when I was nervous before a gig, but I felt my nerves dissipate and my stage persona seemed to take over as soon as I put on my jumper.

Steve Martin's costume also indicated a change between his offstage and onstage self: "Robert Klein remembers [...] when Klein was cracking jokes backstage before the show, [Steve] Martin pulled him up short, asking coolly, "Are you always on?" After he took off the white suit and put away the balloon animals, Steve Martin never seemed to be on" (Zoglin 2008: 126). Andy Kaufman also used costume to indicate a change in self, but for him it was a change of character, not just persona; he used costume to change into Tony Clifton and reportedly "would never break character. Even in interviews with reporters, Kaufman refused to admit he and Clifton were the same person" (Zoglin 2008: 175).

Effect of costume on audience

Clothes help inform other people about ourselves, they give information. I have identified four primary effects of costume on the audience: individuality; a signpost of a character (as opposed to a `persona`) comedian; to convey the comic's persona, saving them valuable stage time; and to contrast the material, creating humour.

Firstly, the matter of individuality and identification. Steve Martin "grew a beard and long hair, and started wearing purple hippie beards onstage. After a year of that, he shaved and cut his hair and went back to suits – eventually settling on form-fitting white ones because he thought they'd make him stand out more onstage" (Zoglin 2008: 131). He is a comic whose stage costume helps to make him more memorable to the audience.

Secondly, costume can be used to distinguish a comedian as performing a character, as opposed to a persona, such as Barry Humphries' Les Patterson and Caroline Aherne's Mrs Merton. Costume can be used alongside props and a different name, to indicate to the audience that the presented person onstage is in fact an invented character: "There's a clear division between Steve Coogan and the various guises he adopts in his stand-up act [...] The separation between comedian and characters is clearly signalled by the costumes, the wigs, the make-up and the names he gives them" (Double 2005: 73). As Double says, "[t]he performer-character distinction means that comedians like [Steve] Coogan and [Harry] Enfield enjoy a lot of licence. We know that when [Coogan's] Paul

Calf says something offensive or ignorant, this is the character's opinion, not Coogan's" (2005: 74).

Thirdly, a comedian can use costume that complements their material, to convey their persona and perspective. Often a stand-up has only minutes onstage, so it is vital to use this time effectively to have maximum impact. There is a focus on the personality of the comedian, on their perspective and world view, so it is important that the comedian uses everything they can to convey their personality as quickly as possible, and costume is something they can use:

> "We also use dress, consciously or unconsciously, as one of the ways in which we project ourselves, the self we wish to present to the world, the group with which we desire to be associated. It is a strong and visible part of our need to assert identity [...] and thus forms part of our individuation"
>
> (Suthrell 2004: 14).

Milton Jones is a comic who found that his costume could convey hints about his persona and his material, and has used this to great effect: "I put hair wax in and put on a silly jumper…that's provided more of a signpost for the type of material I was doing. Probably sort of helped me" (Milton Jones in Double 2005: 76).

Lastly, comedians can take this idea of the costume being an indicator of their persona, and subvert this by presenting the opposite, or a contrast at least, in the material they use. Jenny Lecoat (mentioned earlier) provides an example of how a comedian could develop their costume to contrast their persona and material, providing an interesting juxtaposition. As Marc points out, "[j]ust as an actor wears a costume in a play, a stand-up can present an image" (1989: 18), but whether or not this `image` is reflected or refracted by the material is the choice of the comedian.

To summarise: if we were to imagine a man walking onstage, dressed as a punk and sporting a green mohawk, we can see these four effects in action. The first effect is that he is immediately memorable and identifiable. The second is that, dressed as boldly as he is, that the audience might assume that he is playing a character, rather than speaking as `himself`. The third is that upon seeing him so dressed, the audience might assume his material would rail against the establishment, and if this is so, he has saved himself valuable stage time by *showing* them this, rather than *telling* them. However, if the audience is assuming such from his costume, he could use the fourth effect and

immediately create humour by simply talking about helping out at the puppy shelter, for example. The idea of something so endearing being done by someone who looks so aggressive provides a juxtaposition that is instantly humorous, it in itself is the joke and he need say nothing more.

The Cross-Dresser

Breaking down gender/gender roles

As it is given such high status in our early development, gender tends to be the first thing a person notices about another, so forms the foundation of the person we get to know: "When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is "male or female?" and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty." (Freud 1933 22: 113).

We are taught to think of gender in binaries (although as awareness of transgender people is increasing, this could be changing): "One of the first readings we are taught in our lives is gender. Is it a man? Is it a woman? We are taught these as bedrock definitions, with no possibility for multiple meanings, no playful ambiguity" (Ferris 1993: 8). Clothes are vital in determining the gender of a person (in western society, at least, where clothes for men and women are quite different): "[T]he primary social role of clothing, distinct from its utilitarian functions of warmth and protection, is to render the gender of the wearer discernible at a glance" (Senelick 2000: 2), so we can start forming that foundation as soon as possible.

When a person cross-dresses (particularly if they do so convincingly), they are confusing their gender reading, making it difficult for people to form a foundation on which to understand them. But it can undermine more than gender reading:

> "If essence of gender can be simulated through wigs, props, gestures, costumes, cross-dressing implies that it is not an essence at all, but an unstable construct[5]. Gender assignment which at first looks to be deeply rooted in biological imperatives and social exigencies turns out to be no more essential than table manners"
>
> (Senelick 2000: 3).

If cross-dressing can unsettle something that is seemingly so important to us and our society, it will be met with uncertainty and apprehension, which could explain why so much cross-dressing is seen on the fringes of society, and only limited and specific forms of it can be seen in mainstream entertainment. For example, whilst drag queens are seen widely in entertainment (the recent popularity of *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a prime example

---

[5] M. Hunt, `Girls will be boys`, *Women's Review of Books*, September 1989 (as cited in Senelick 2000)

of this), drag kings are not. There is a thriving drag king scene in Manchester[6] but they are scarce throughout the rest of the country. The reason cross-dressing is sometimes confined to the fringe, as put forward by Senelick, is that "[g]ender is seen as so unstable that any action relating to it must be an attempt to either shore it up or demolish it" (2000: 10). Most of us do not realise our dependence on gender to know someone, it is subconscious, so disruptions affect us subtly, and our reactions can be hard to recognise and define.

Cross-dressing confronts such absolutes as gender binaries and offers us a subject without gender, as proposed by Garber:

> "it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of "female" and "male," [...] The current popularity of cross-dressing as a theme in art and criticisms represents, I think, an undertheorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking, whether particularized (sic.) as male and female, black and white, yes and no, Republican and Democrat, self and other, or in any other way"
>
> (1992: 10-11).

Cross-dresser as outsider

"Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have they say, more important offers than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us."
(Woolf 1928: 129)

Far from being `vain trifles`, clothes are one of the primary indicators we use to identify someone's gender, therefore cross-dressers confuse their gender reading and thus acquire outsider status. Suthrell argues that "dress mediates between the individual and the world and is a key element in the constructed image that says `I belong`. One could question, then, why clothes are used in a manner that sometimes signifies just the opposite; the act of not belonging, or belonging to an `anti-category`" (2004: 16). Cross-dressers are doing exactly that: using clothes that signify they do not belong. Comedians can take this idea and use it when deciding on their stage costume: do they want to signify that they belong or that they do not belong?

---

[6] Akhtar for *The Guardian Online*

One of the enduring misconceptions surrounding cross-dressing, is that those who do it are in some way degenerate – "At the base...lurks a primordial belief that gender tokens are magical, and to abuse them will transform and denature the abuser" (Senelick 2000: 1). The connotations of pederasty from the boy-players of the Renaissance, and the breeches roles that afforded men the opportunity to see women's legs (normally hidden from sight, lest they titillate), have surrounded the world of cross-dressing with suspicions of sexual deviance.

As awareness of homosexual activity became more public and more accepted, the sexual habits of those who liked to cross-dress were brought into question – "the perception of female impersonation as a homosexual practice" (Hamilton in Ferris 1993: 107). This had not always been the case: female and male impersonators had been accomplished performers in the late nineteenth century, sometimes labelled `illusionists`, and held in similar esteem to magicians. However, "[b]y the late 1930s, [female impersonation] held only one meaning: it was purely and simply an act of "degeneracy"" (Hamilton in Ferris 1993: 119). This became the common association with cross-dressing, to the extent that the prominent female impersonator, Julian Eltinge "felt compelled to surround his performances with assurances of his offstage masculinity. It was only those assurances that could counter a growing awareness among his middle-class fans: that female impersonation could hold a sensational meaning – it could imply not a professional skill of performance but a sexually deviant offstage self" (Hamilton in Ferris 1993: 117). It is difficult to know if these associations and assumptions have any grounding in fact, as homosexuality was such a taboo, and was not decriminalised in the whole of the UK until 1982, that few would have spoken openly about any homosexual activity. However, one study was conducted in 1901, finding: "Of fourteen stage female impersonators studied by a German physician at the turn of the [twentieth] century, only six were homosexual, although eight (including three of the married men) wore women's clothes at home." (Dr med. W.S in Senelick 1993: 88).

Male/female impersonation/drag

"For a man, wearing women's dress undermined the authority inherently belonging to the superior sex and placed him in a position of shame" (Howard in Ferris 1993: 25). This `shame` is what has made cross-dressing humorous – someone wanting to assume an

inferior position is so ridiculous a notion that it must be a joke. Howard was not the first to use this theory, but was preceded by Maitland and Ludlam, respectively: "for a man to impersonate a woman is for him to undertake, voluntarily, an act of self-humiliation" (1986: 89); "`There is a prejudice against a man dressing up as a woman because women are considered inferior beings.  For a man to dress up as a woman is a step down`" (in Ferris 1993: 6).

`Shame` and `self-humiliation` seem bizarre ways to create comedy (as they could just as easily create pity), but to take a `step down` is to take the position of the clown, who takes an inferior position to his/her audience.

By wearing women's clothing, men immediately lower their societal status, which creates both humour and comfort for the audience. But when women wear men's clothes they are raising their status, which is not as ridiculous, therefore not as humorous, but it also causes discomfort for the audience. Howard also claims that "[w]hen women took men's clothes, they symbolically left their subordinate positions. They became masterless women, and this threatened overthrow of hierarchy was discursively read as the eruption of uncontrolled sexuality" (in Ferris 1993: 26). This idea that they were sexually available and/or promiscuous could have been contributing to the lack of female cross-dressing performers, and the reason why "the field of gender impersonation is dominated and controlled by men" (Maitland 1986: 89). It must also be noted that a drag act is, in the end, a performance, and the world of performance is still dominated by men, in terms of both representation onstage, and at the management level.

In 1987 Banks and Swift discussed the British phenomenon of the pantomime dame and asserted that,

> "the pantomime dame is comic because the prospect of a man becoming a woman is laughable – he has lost his customary social status and appears ridiculous in the generic trappings of a woman. Traditionally, the process is not reversed when a woman cross-dresses, although, with the advent of feminism and the re-evaluation of gender roles, women [...] have dressed and performed as men to great comic effect"
>
> (1987: 112).

This supports the argument that cross-dressing for performance is different for men and women, and that this depends on the issue of position in society. However, they do

suggest that since the advent of feminism women have been enjoying a rising status that has allowed them more opportunity to cross-dress with comic success. Since this book was written we have seen the success of female cross-dressing in the performances of Kathy Burke as the teenage boy Perry in *Harry Enfield and Chums* in the late 1990s, Catherine Tate as the middle-aged Derek Faye in her sketch show in the 2000s, and more recently in 2015, *Saturday Night Live*'s Kate McKinnon in her portrayal of Justin Bieber.

Burke is arguably the most recognisable of these examples, especially in the UK. What is interesting about Burke's success is that she plays a teenager, a young man, and this is in keeping with female drag traditions. Just as in the early modern period of theatre boys were used to best portray women, so women are best portraying boys, or young men. This is explained in Isabelle Eberhardt's experiences of dressing as a man to `pass` during her travels around the world: "When in men's clothing, Arab or Western, she was often "read", like many cross-dressing women, as a "boy" rather than a man. Her "dainty hands" and smooth complexion gave her away" (Garber 1992: 326-7). Here we can see why women would tend to cross-dress as young men, as their looks are closer to that of a boy's than of a man's. Senelick offers us another reason why women are most successful when portraying young men: "transpositions were acceptable only when the age represented was transitional and, according to social conventions, the least sexually active: young women might play prepubescent lads – the Peter Pan motif – and men might play post-menopausal matrons – the Charley's Aunt motif – for those conditions offered minimal threat to standard gender identities" (in Ferris 1993: 81). Here we come back to the idea that transvestism is threatening to people's understanding of gender and gender identity.

Whether male-to-female or female-to-male, Senelick asserts that "[b]oth styles of performance functioned as wish-fulfilment. Male impersonation responded to women's longing for the freedom and license available to young men. Female impersonation responded to man's longing for woman's colourful trappings and the strategy of vulnerability" (in Ferris 1993: 93). Here Senelick is referring only to *performance*, and not to offstage transvestites. In contrast, the latter could be seen by society as degenerates, homosexuals or deviants:

> "On stage the *female* impersonator could flaunt a courtesan's wardrobe and
> coquettish behavior without falling foul of the censure aimed at a woman
> behaving in such a way. The *male* impersonator could replicate a young

rake's swagger and dash, without being condemned for practicing such

behavior in real life. Figures that were highly sexualized and consequently

highly threatening were made acceptably attractive"

(Senelick in Ferris 1993: 93).

Certainly, these `highly sexualised figures` are `acceptably attractive` to a contemporary

audience, as evidenced by Lily Savage on primetime TV, and *La Cage aux Folles* and

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert in the West End in recent years.

Nicola Bolsover   nb328@kent.ac.uk

Creative Process

My practical work needed to address the issues of the female cross-dresser, as I am a female practitioner so can only take this perspective. As highlighted above, female transvestism is not as mainstream or popular as the male version, so I am faced with the challenge of creating a popular and entertaining performance amid the connotations of a divisive art form. By starting with full male impersonation, I am taking my experiments as far from my normal performance as possible, the aim being to scale back as the project develops, ending with a usable costume or style that I can take on into my professional practice.

Nick Ward

When I started my research I knew I would be focusing on the work of music hall star Vesta Tilley. With music hall being the birth of modern stand-up comedy, and male impersonation being a notable medium within music hall, it is a logical place to start this process of research into and performance of female-to-male cross-dressing in comedy performance. Vesta Tilley is the most famous of the halls' male impersonators, and my research into her performances was the starting point for creating my onstage male persona, Nick Ward.

It is important to note that Nick Ward is a *persona*, not a *character*. For the most part, when a comic uses clothes that are different from their own, a different name from their own, and especially when they are using a different gender to their own, they are employing a comic character; perfect examples are Paul O'Grady's Lily Savage, Barry Humphries' Dame Edna Everidge, and Steve Coogan's Pauline Calf. All wear different clothes to the comedian, use a different name to the comedian, and have a different gender to the comedian; but more than that, they have different lives to the comedian, with created families, histories and anecdotes. Nick Ward is different. He has different clothes, a different name and a different gender, but his family, history and anecdotes are the same as mine. I would use the same material onstage as Nick Ward as I would as Nicola Bolsover, and so he is not a character but a persona.

The influence of reading about Vesta Tilley made me want my first performance to be a male impersonation. I read how the minutiae of the male gait had been captured in her

performance and made the audience marvel at her skill, and this was something I wanted to recreate, or at least to which to pay homage. I (wrongly) took this even further to the point that I wanted to deceive the audience, to fool them into believing I was actually a man, therefore neglecting a very important part of what makes gender impersonation so successful, that "[m]ale (and for that matter female) impersonation depends for its effect largely on the knowledge of the audience that it is an impersonation" (Maitland 1986: 24). If the audience do not know it is an impersonation there is nothing at which to marvel, nothing by which to be impressed, and so part of its purpose is lost. If the audience is not aware that the performer is cross-dressing then any significance in cross-dressing is lost; in a sense, the performer is not cross-dressing. By hiding from the audience that I was cross-dressing, I removed the symbolism and poignancy gained by cross-dressing. However, I did reveal towards the end of the show that I was actually a woman, therefore revealing I had been cross-dressing the whole time. With hindsight I feel it would have been more effective had I revealed this earlier in the set. For example, I could have come onstage as a woman and then put on the beard, so the audience would have been fully aware from the start, and then my cross-dressing could have had its full effect.

"But male-impersonation – within the theatrical conventions available – does not seek to confuse; finally, it does not really require deception. It *pretends* to be deceptive, and is thus, so to speak, doubly deceptive" (Maitland 1986: 10). Deceiving the audience was always going to be a difficult feat, as almost every person there knew me personally. This may have been part of the reason why I felt so uncomfortable appearing as Nick Ward. Despite having appeared onstage `as a man` many times before, I was profoundly uncomfortable when I dressed up as Nick Ward. At first I thought my discomfort was due to feeling unfeminine and also feeling ugly (as predicted by Germaine Greer, as mentioned previously), but after more analysis I have better identified what made me feel that way. As a woman I have grown accustomed to managing my body and face, and finding ways to make myself look and feel attractive, through my hair, clothes and make-up. When I dressed as Nick Ward I arranged my hair in a way in which I did not usually (I used a centre parting, which is commonly seen on men with long hair), I did not wear make-up, and I wore male clothing which did not flatter my body the way my normal clothes do. All this took away the control I normally have over the way I look. The way I normally look is in part determined by social convention, and by my role in society. Dressing as Nick Ward meant leaving behind the things which help me display who I am.

Performing to people who are used to seeing me in my everyday life, it is no wonder that I became uncomfortable without the elements that make up how I present myself to them normally. In addition to this, I had bound my chest. With my chest bound I felt that I had lost my femininity, I had lost a big part of what makes me feel like a woman, and I did not enjoy it. I had underestimated how much I personally identify as a woman. In order to effectively perform a male impersonation, it is important that the performer feel comfortable, or at the very least give the audience the impression that they are comfortable.

The result would probably have been very different for a comedian who is also an offstage transvestite, but for me it was profoundly difficult, awkward and frankly, embarrassing. For a comedian like me who is not an offstage transvestite, this is an extreme way of using cross-dressing. If a comedian is portraying an invented comic character this is unlikely to be a problem. However, our gender is not just fundamental to other people's understanding of us, but also to our understanding of ourselves. Stand-up is so reliant on the presentation of `self` and on the individuality of `persona`, that if a stand-up dresses up to such an extent that they no longer recognise their reflection as being their own (as I did), they are likely to become unsettled and present a confused persona. Given the limited time given to a comedian to convey their persona, any confusion is a detriment to the task at hand.

Following the Nick Ward show, I knew it was important that I should feel more comfortable onstage. In my usual stand-up performances I have become so comfortable in my stage costume, that I rarely feel nervous and I can perform to my best ability; my stage costume. It feels like a second skin so does not interfere with my performance. However, dressing as Nick Ward had clearly made me uncomfortable to an extent, and my performance suffered as a result. Therefore, I needed to find a way of wearing Nick Ward's clothes without feeling so uncomfortable. Not binding my chest ensured I would be more physically comfortable, but I needed to change the psychological effect of the costume. Malloy's observation helped me understand the discomfort I experienced:

> "`The "imitation man look" does not refer to looking tough or masculine. The effect is more like that of a small boy who dresses up in his father's clothing. He looks cute, not authoritative...The same thing applies to

women. When a woman wears certain clothes with male colors (sic.) or patterns, her femaleness is accentuated. She frequently looks more diminutive. And this reduces her authority`"

(1977: 28)

I had felt diminutive, and this feeling made performing stand-up difficult. The stand-up comedian's position as an outsider gives them status and a position of authority: "the joke consists in challenging a dominant structure and belittling it; the joker who provokes the laughter is chosen to challenge the relevance of the dominant structure and to perform with immunity the act which wipes out the venial offence" (Douglas 1970: 159). If Malloy is correct in stating that dressing in men's clothes reduces a woman's authority, this could explain why I felt less able to confidently perform stand-up when dressed in men's clothing: I had lost the authority which I needed to confidently and effectively perform stand-up.

Monkeyshine

This second performance was a shorter one, at between five and ten minutes of stage time, and was part of an open mic comedy night, as opposed to the solo show I had done before. The comedy night (called *Monkeyshine*) was also somewhere I performed regularly as Nicola Bolsover, and so I knew I would be recognisable. This spurred me to make a change in this performance; I knew I would never be able to deceive this audience into thinking I was a man, so I made no such attempt. My methodology for this performance was to wear the same clothes I had worn previously as Nick Ward, including the beard, but I did not bind my chest, nor stuff socks down my trousers, and I asked to be introduced by the compère as Nicola Bolsover. My intention here was to make clear to the audience that I was a woman dressed as a man, as opposed to the Nick Ward show where I was a woman impersonating a man. I had read Solomon's contention that "men dressed as women often *parody* gender, women dressed as men, on the other hand, tend to *perform* gender" (in Ferris 1993: 13) and the *Nick Ward* show aligned with this idea as I aimed to perform as a man and made very little comment of it; it was certainly not a parody. With this in mind, I wanted to use much the same appearance as before, but I wanted to parody maleness, rather than perform it.

Dressing as Nick Ward had made me uncomfortable, and as a result my performance suffered. In an attempt to make myself feel more at ease than I had done as Nick Ward, I directly addressed my appearance to the audience, hoping that by doing so I would feel less self-conscious and would give a more relaxed and confident performance. Doing so would also aid me in making my performance a parody. By asking the audience how to take my hair off my face in a `masculine` way and demonstrating their ideas, I was mocking the concept of masculinity. Much as drag queens take elements of femininity (such as beautification using make-up and hair styling) and parody them, I aimed to take elements of masculinity and do the same. The difficulty in doing this is that "performing maleness means reducing facial expressiveness, reining in exuberance, holding back – the opposite of what drag queens do" (Solomon in Ferris 1993: 148). So a drag queen exaggerates elements of femininity, whereas a drag king or a male impersonator must do the opposite, must `hold back`; it is far easier to put emphasis on something by exaggerating it, than it is to put emphasis on it by holding back. The cabaret performer and drag queen Michael Twaits suggested to me that it is this disparity between male and female drag that prevent the latter from being as popular as the former: "drag queens exaggerate life […] and there's fun to be had in watching a man being more flamboyant than he is, but drag kings…the way they play on masculinity usually is…restricting their physicality and vocal range. So you've actually got an inhibited performer".

Knowing I would be facing this difficulty, I decided that I had to find an overt way of addressing `masculinity`, and so I talked to the audience directly about it and asked their advice regarding appearing and behaving in a more masculine way. I then took their advice and exaggerated it, in a manner that would ensure it would never be perceived as a convincing male impersonation, but instead be humorous. At first, this would seem to contradict Solomon's assertion as I was performing maleness by exaggerating, just as drag queens do when performing as women. However, if we look back to Solomon's earlier statement about the distinction between male and female impersonation being performing and parodying gender respectively, and we know that my aim in this performance was to *parody* gender, this performance serves to support Solomon's statement. For Solomon there is a clear distinction between `performing` and `parodying`, but there is still something amiss in her latter statement. It can be accepted that most women tend to be more exuberant than most men, but there are camp and flamboyant men, the portrayal of which (by a woman) would require exaggeration. Perhaps, in order to successfully parody men, women should create a more effeminate

character. Interviewing Michael Twaits, he told me that, "it'd be brilliant to see a drag king who is…just a good, fun character, almost channelling someone like Graham Norton, so it's a kind of camp drag king. I don't know how else you can get it to work in a way that's as commercial as a drag queen is".

This performance was about, for me, finding a way of being at ease while appearing in a very masculine way, which I had previously found uncomfortable. By being direct and honest with the audience, I avoided the trap of trying to deceive them, and so felt more able to relax and be myself. Of course, with my persona and my style of delivery being so integral to my act being funny, it is vital I feel able to be myself onstage. Also, by being able to present my usual flamboyant self, I created a juxtaposition with my `grunge` look, which, as already established, creates humour in itself.

Final Show

My experiments with cross-dressing thus far had led me to conclude that male impersonation was not my forté. By this I do not mean just my ability to perform like a man, but also my comfort performing in men's clothing, and also the direction in which cross-dressing took my material. I had found that my desire to appear `masculine` was inhibiting my usual flamboyancy, which is a key part of my performance style and what brings humour to my anecdotes. So, with my final show for this project, I wanted to explore a broader range of costumes with elements of cross-dressing, and focusing in particular on the idea of androgyny. My method in this performance was to have four different outfits, and therefore potentially four separate stage personas, and to compare and contrast how each performance made me feel and how it helped or hindered my performance. In brief these four styles were:

1) High heels, heavy make up, and a dress
2) Leggings and a hooded sweatshirt
3) A low cut dress, and a fake beard
4) My regular stage costume of knitted jumper and trousers.

What is important to note is that by this point I had stopped regarding `cross-dressing` as the appearance of the opposite gender, but as the use of clothing more normally or historically considered clothing belonging to the opposite gender (trousers being

intended for men and skirts for women, for example). Senelick provides a distinction between cross-dressing and androgyny: "Traditional cross-dressing rarely intends fusion, the *sine qua non* of androgyny, but rather gender division through choice of one polarity or another. Whatever androgynous qualities it may possess tend to be adventitious" (Senelick 2000: 2), which helped guide me through this part of the project. In this final performance I wanted to move away from `gender division` and more towards the `fusion` of androgyny.

I wanted to explore the notion of whether cross-dressing demands an element of admiration or respect for the opposite sex, or if the portrayal is laced with more vindictive undertones. In the previous chapter I examined the differences between male and female cross-dressing in performance, and one element of this was that "[m]ost female-impersonation – and any which is allowed mass appeal – caricatures the least attractive female stereotypes [...] Meanwhile, male-impersonators usually present favourable images of masculinity" (Maitland 1986: 90). However, there are opinions which contrast this assertion, such as Marranca, Fuchs and Rabkin's opinion that "men strive for a kind of androgynous utopia in transvestism. Women, on the other hand, tend to make a critique of maleness, and the quality of admiration is missing in their portrayal of the other sex" (in Ferris 1993: 14). These two notions are in direct conflict with one another; how can women present `favourable` male characters and yet portray no `admiration` in their performance? In fact, in all my research, Marranca, Fuchs and Rabkin's statement is the only evidence I have found that female impersonation is anything other than a "misogynistic put-down of women" (Garber 1992: 149) (this quote is over twenty years old so it is entirely possible that this could have changed). Having worked with drag performers, I personally do not agree with Garber that female impersonation is wholly misogynistic.[7] In performances on stage and screen I see much appreciation for and sympathy with women in drag performance. Likewise, I think women *can* portray men with admiration, and I wanted to prove this in my final show, and in particular in the section about boy bands.

In reference to male impersonation, Maitland states that "[m]en have the capacity to control almost all of the channels through which male-impersonators might seek their necessary audience – both in the crude sense of owning the theatres, the press and the media; and in the cultural sense of creating and manipulating the images and perceptions

---

[7] Despite having asked drag queen Michael Twaits what he disliked about drag and his first response being, "misogyny"

of `femininity`'" (1986: 101). If we concede that men can create and manipulate the images and perceptions of femininity, it would be fair to assert that femininity is a male construct, or at least it has been in the past. This would be supported by Garber, writing in reference to `female female impersonators`: "a sign of the constructedness of "woman" and of women's interimplication with the male "gaze"" (1992: 280). Dolan also supports the notion that `femininity` is a male construct, and shows this within the context of male drag:

> "`both spectator and performer conspire to construct a male-identified subject that is left out of the terms of exchange: women are non-existent in drag performance, but women-as-myth, as a cultural, ideological object, is constructed in an agreed upon exchange between the male performer and the usually male spectator. Male drag mirrors women's socially constructed roles`"
>
> (Dolan in Ferris 1993: 10).

I took this notion and looked at boy bands: if femininity has been constructed to appeal to men, perhaps the masculinity displayed by boy bands is the masculinity that has been constructed to appeal to women, or girls.

I deliberately wanted the focus in this section on the show to be on my content, not my outfit. Therefore I chose to wear an androgynous hooded sweatshirt with a pair of leggings, my hair tied back so as to not interfere with my performance by my fiddling with it. I talked about and impersonated boy band members: men who are clichés, and in some cases parodies, of themselves and their gender. The masculinity performed by boy band members is constructed, formulated and over-the-top, in a way made to appeal to the pre-pubescent female market and encourage them to spend their pocket money on the bands' albums and merchandise.

I was parodying men I greatly love and admire, gently mocking them with respect and no maliciousness. I was attempting to emulate *drag performance* as opposed to *impersonation*; drag performers tend to parody performers they revere, often miming (lip-synching) to songs by singers they love; I did the same using the boy bands I love and miming to their songs.

Continuing this idea of femininity being a construct, I began to question what femininity even *is*, what it is for, who it is for, and what are the elements that make it. I became

quite cynical about it, seeing femininity as a *male* construct (as I mentioned previously), and I decided to talk openly about this in the show. I dressed in a stereotypical 'sexy' way, in a dress, heels and copious make up. I then used my experience as a dancer of Latin styles, which are dances that heavily promote the woman as the one who should bring the sexuality to the dance by using their bodies in an overtly `feminine` way. As I was already cynical about the `feminine` aspect of dance, it seemed a perfect medium to discuss my feelings on femininity as a male construct.

I opened the show with this discussion of femininity, with the aim of showing the audience my perspective early on, and breaking down the idea of femininity throughout the show. Although female female impersonators, or faux queens (women appearing as female impersonators), are quite rare, I believe that their style of performance is the perfect medium for sending up the notion of femininity as a male construct. As such, my original intention was to open the show as a faux queen, but Solomon provided the inspiration for me to scale this down and simply appear in an overtly `feminine` way. She stated that, "[p]recisely because "man" is the presumed universal, and "woman" the gussied-up other, drag changes meaning depending on who's wearing it, depending on which way the vestments are crossed. And since femininity is *always* drag, no matter who paints on the nail polish and mascara, it's easy to caricature." (in Ferris 1993: 145). It is this idea of femininity always being drag that I wanted to explore and play with. By wearing highly colourful make-up, and lots of it, and by wearing a feminine and verging-on-glamorous dress, I was emulating drag queens and highlighting the similarities between what we understand as femininity and what we understand as drag; I was walking the knife's edge between appearing as a glamorous woman and appearing as a cross-dressed man.

It was important I took this beyond simply my appearance, as one of my assertions about costume in stand-up is that the two elements work together (whether by complementing each other or by working in juxtaposition) to form a more whole and enriched performance. I chose the subject matter of my dancing and my struggles with the `femininity` of dancing, to emphasise the ridiculousness of `femininity`, the `constructedness` of femininity, and the notion that drag queens present femininity better than women do. The latter is substantiated by Solomon: "the man in drag has even been said to epitomize femininity far better than a woman ever could" (in Ferris 1993: 145). My aim with the opening section of my final show was to introduce to the

audience the idea that `femininity` is not real, that it is a construct, and I took inspiration from drag queens and faux queens, mixing in my own experiences of `femininity`. By breaking down the audience's perception of femininity, I was working towards becoming a blank canvas, so to speak, to becoming a person not bound by the conventions and expectations of my given gender. The next time I appeared, in a hooded sweatshirt and leggings, and talking about and impersonating boy bands, I was breaking down the idea of masculinity, pointing out the times at which it is a construct as much as femininity is. By taking apart the notions of femininity and masculinity, and by demonstrating the elements of both that are part of me (by switching in and out of `feminine` and `masculine` behaviour), I was aiming to introduce a self as a person without an easily-defined gender, in preparation for my next appearance in this show.

By this point I had established that gendered behaviour is constructed, a myth, and I now wanted to experiment with the appearance of gender. Having explored male appearance in the previous two shows, I wanted instead to use androgynous appearance. I have earlier discussed androgynous appearance in the context of stand-up comedy, most commonly witnessed as women wearing suits, or jeans and t-shirts. However, it is not this kind of androgynous *clothing* I wanted to explore (for it is mostly the clothing that is androgynous, apart from the sometimes boyish hairstyles), but more the physical appearance of an androgyny. I did not want to pass for a true androgyny as my research and previous performance as Nick Ward had already led me to find that cross-dressing and impersonation require the audience's knowledge that there is a deception; true deception defeats the purpose of the impersonation. Alongside this, "[p]ictorially, true androgynies are shown naked or partially naked, displaying the anatomical sexual attributes of unclothed men and women: their nature is best demonstrated stripped bare" (Senelick 2000: 2). These androgynies were pictured so for people to be amazed at their simultaneous attributes belonging to both genders, to prove their status as hermaphrodites.

I am a biological woman, not an androgyny, so cannot prove anything by appearing naked, and as I do not wish to deceive, I have no need to appear naked. I must therefore look to other physical identifiers of gender. Personally, the part of my body that I believe most helps me to be identified as a woman, and the part which makes me feel most feminine, is my chest. And when I dressed as a man it was not the socks I had stuffed down my trousers that helped me feel and appear `manly`, but the fake beard I had stuck

to my face. In both cases, the thing that identifies gender for me was not genitalia. So, in the third section of the show I aimed to present a person with no clearly defined gender, and to do this without using clothes as the primary means. As I personally feel that beards and breasts are effective gender markers, I decided to use both, hence my appearance in a low-cut dress to show off my cleavage, and a fake beard stuck to my face (albeit done in a rush and not effectively!). I had some reservations, some uncertainties as to whether or not I had effectively portrayed an androgyny as opposed to a person wearing androgynous clothing, but in *Vested Interests* I found this distinction which supported my choices: "Hirschfeld saw a relationship between androgynes [*sic.*] and transvestites; where androgynes [*sic.*] were concerned with the *physical* marks of gender (beard, breasts, genitals), transvestites concerned themselves instead with *physical* or psychological gender signs, like dress and names" (Garber 1992: 131-132). Using this statement, it is clear that I used the physical signs used by androgynies, and not the markers used by transvestites (it should be noted that Hirschfeld and Garber are discussing transvestites and not people who wear androgynous clothes, although it can be argued that the latter are transvestites: if trousers are the garb of men, then women who wear trousers are transvestites).

One of the most important things learnt from this show is that the scope for female cross-dressing is wider than some think. Solomon's comparison of men *parodying* women, but women *performing* men, has been shown to be a narrow perspective. By looking at the parts of female behaviour that men satirise when in cross-dress, and finding similar elements of male behaviour to mock, I could prove that while cross-dressed women do not *tend* to parody maleness, the opportunity is there. The same section of the show (the boy band section) also served to disprove the theory from Marranca, Fuchs and Rabkin that women lack admiration in their portrayal of men.

Fundamentally, this show developed my concept of cross-dressing; at the start I had seen cross-dressing as the use of the opposite gender's clothes and appearance to obtain the status and perspective of the other sex. Through this show I learnt that by use of gendered clothing (like trousers and skirts) or gendered physical attributes (like breasts and beards), the comedian can obtain the status of *neither* gender, of something without context, preconceptions or connotations, and be a true outsider.

Lady Luck

Originally I had not thought of this performance as part of this project, but I have since come to realise that it shows an important development in my practice, that is very much owed to my experiences of cross-dressing in performance.

Until this point I had always avoided two things in my comedy: swearing, and talking about sex. The latter I avoided in part because of its divisive nature as a subject matter for women to talk about publically. Personally, I do not believe it should be controversial at all, but the fact remains that many people take issue against it. Many times when I have told people that I'm a stand-up comedian, they have responded by enquiring as to the nature of my material, and expressing their distaste at women talking about `sex and periods` onstage. A little over forty years ago, Fisher wrote of the way women could discuss less savoury topics onstage, relating it to a `masculine attitude`:

> "comediennes [...] have all revealed a strongly developed masculine attitude
> to their work, smothering any element of femininity, of sexual attractiveness
> that might obtrude in their stage characterisations [...] The air of
> independence so gained strips away pretensions in howls of laughter and
> provides inoffensive scope for the most suggestive material, otherwise
> taboo on the lips of a glamorous woman and likely to cause uneasiness
> amongst both sexes"

(1973: 197).

I also avoided it because it did not suit my onstage persona, but probably above all, because I felt uncomfortable talking about it due to its personal nature. I avoided swearing because, again, it didn't seem to suit my stage persona, but also because I have always felt that swearing was a lazy way to get a laugh, by playing with people's discomfort around certain taboo words. I still believe the latter to be true, so will still avoid deliberately using swear words and especially using them in punch-lines, but I have decided to become less strict with myself (hence my one use of a profanity in the *Lady Luck* show). My experience as Nick Ward has shown me that it is important that I feel relaxed onstage, so the less pressure I put on myself the better I can perform, and instigating rules on the language I use adds pressure. However, my opinion towards talking about sex onstage began to change.

As earlier discussed, onstage costume can be used by a comedian to complement their onstage persona, or to provide a contrast to themselves and their material. I had always used my hand-knitted jumpers to complement the eccentric and somewhat childish aspects of my persona and material, but I decided instead to use my costume in juxtaposition to my material. A woman wearing a *The Little Mermaid* jumper knitted by her mother is definitely not expected to tell a story about sexual fetishes. Considering my previous feelings about talking about sex onstage, it was a considerable change in my perspective and my degree of comfort to tell the story I told which left little to the imagination about my private life. Admittedly, I chose to tell the story about me finding a pet bowl in Disneyland because it is a good story, with a level of embarrassment verging on the unbelievable, making it a humorous story that I felt had to be told. But I also found I had developed the confidence to tell the story. I no longer felt the discomfort I had felt before at the idea of telling such a personal anecdote, and I believe this was due to my experiences of cross-dressed performance.

By dressing differently to how I normally dress onstage, I was breaking away from what I had become at ease doing. Before this project I knew who I was onstage, what I looked like, what I spoke about, how I behaved. But by changing one aspect of my onstage self, I could change other parts too. Although I in fact changed very little else in my previous shows other than my name and physicality (my approach to writing material did not change), even those small changes opened my mind to the possibilities of trying new things. So when it came to using this anecdote, I was less afraid to use it thanks to my recent experiences of experimenting with my performance style.

Towards the end of the gig I removed my *The Little Mermaid* jumper to reveal I was wearing a PVC corset underneath (there is a zip running down the front of the corset, which I'd deliberately left a little undone so that there was a lot of cleavage on display, to make the image more risqué). At the time of this gig there was a trend of women taking photographs of themselves wearing no make-up and posting these pictures on social networks (it was known as and trended as #nomakeupselfie) to raise awareness of women's cancers. I had recently been challenged to post such a photograph of myself, but as I explained in the show, this was no challenge for me as I am very happy to be seen without make-up. However, I did not want to ignore the challenge and its worthy cause, and inspiration struck when I thought of how I had been considering wearing the corset for this show. My first thought was to wear the corset for the whole set, to complement

and serve as reinforcement for the material. However, I decided it would be more fun and provide more texture to the performance if I dressed in a contrary way (and nothing seemed more suitable than my favourite hand-knitted jumper), and instead revealed the corset at the end. I used the idea of the aforementioned photo challenge to dare myself to publically do something that made me feel uncomfortable. The audience were cheering and laughing from the moment of the reveal, but by my then drawing attention to the fact that I was not wearing a bra, as though that were the challenge for me, I could gain more cheers and laughter. The corset served three purposes for me: it corroborated my story about my fetishes, it worked with a piece of current popular culture that I could satirise, and it provided a raunchy, burlesque style physical gag where I pretended the zip on the front had got stuck and I could not do it up. It involved a lot of feigned effort, even more jiggling of my cleavage, and asking a woman from the audience to help me.

Conclusion

The Power of Stand-up

It has already been established that the stand-up comedian has a position as an outsider, on the edge of society and able to comment on it from the fringes. The establishment of persona is key in obtaining outsider status, and as previously discussed, costume can be used to help convey persona by complementing it. An effective costume can save a comedian valuable stage time by giving an indication of their persona before they've even spoken, which helps to establish their status as an outsider as early as possible, affording them use of comedic licence much earlier on in the set. Mintz links the gaining of this outsider status to the presentation of `self` (wherever that `self` lies on the spectrum of persona and character): "The comedian then establishes his or her comic persona, discussing personal background, life-style, and some attitudes and beliefs. This allows the audience to accept the comedian's marginal status and to establish that the mood of comic license is operative" (1985: 79). With this comedic licence the possibilities of what a comedian can do onstage are greatly expanded: "The key to understanding the role of standup comedy in the process of cultural affirmation and subversion is a recognition of the comedian's traditional *license* for deviate behavior and expression" (Mintz 1985: 74).

This licence can be used "to redefine what is acceptable" (Double 2005: 155). Lenny Bruce was arguably the first comedian to use his licence to talk about deeper issues and enjoy huge success, and George Carlin believed that this was due to "the honesty, the fact that he didn't ignore or avoid unpleasant truths or realities. That told me that you could tell your own truth – and you might even think of it as the larger truth – and that you could make it entertaining and interesting and a bit daring" (Carlin in Zoglin 2008: 11). If a comedian is able to talk about their `own truth` they are effectively working with no external censorship, and without censorship anything is possible. Stewart Lee noted several times his realisations of this: "Thinking like a comedian meant [...] you could do anything, anytime, anywhere" (2010: 158); when watching Wil Hodgson perform he observed that "one man on a stage in a room could be anything at all, go anywhere, say anything, suggest anything, do anything" (2010: 39); and when watching Ted Chippington perform he concluded that "stand-up could be anything you wanted it to be" (2010: 9).

With comedic licence and the ability to do anything with stand-up, the comedian is left with a blank canvas, so to speak, with which they can re-paint the way society is seen.

Lee helps us see how important distortion can be: "By reversing the norms and breaking the taboos, the clowns show us what we have to lose, and what we also might stand to gain, if we step outside the restrictions of social convention and polite everyday discourse" (Lee 2010: 241), but also shows us how audiences accept this. They accept this distortion and subversion because it is not real, it is just spoken about: "[Paul Provenza] saw the stage of a stand-up club as a giant pair of inverted commas, framing the performer, saying `what is being said here is only being said, not actually done, so judge it accordingly`" (Lee 2010: 150).

However, Marc presents a different perspective. He claims that the absence of the fourth wall actually prohibits the use of risqué material: "By swaddling jokes in the blankets of a drama, an artist could get away with things that would be considered vulgar or even mortally offensive had they been presented to the audience in direct first-person address" (1989:16). If this is true, comedians could employ theatrical techniques to make their material more palatable to the audience. Costume is one such element that would provide a dramatic context, as proved by character comedians, as they are usually costumed and are normally afforded the greatest artistic licence.

Senelick provides an important notion that brings these ideas together, that the comedian is an outsider, and that this status affords him/her a licence which can be used to express things which would otherwise be too controversial:

> "[the theatre] has always walked this knife-edge: a socially sanctioned institution with roots in religion and myth, expected to clarify and convey the establishment ethos in a public forum; and, a haven for outcasts, misfits and uncomfortable temperaments of all stripes, offering opportunities for self-expression that are otherwise unavailable. Much of the theatre's excitement comes from this dynamic, an oscillating tension between these two callings"
>
> (2000: 9).

That quote sums up two things vital to this project: a `haven for outcasts` and the `opportunities for self-expression`. As transvestites are often outcasts, and transvestism is a very personal and bold form of self-expression, transvestite performance should be perfectly at home within a theatrical setting. Stand-up comedy stands somewhere between theatre and reality (particularly with regards to `persona` and `real self`

comedians), and involves a great deal of self-expression, making it ideal for cross-dressing performers. Or, as Garber puts it: "This fear of blurring the line, of not being able to distinguish "reality" from "theater," this susceptibility to fantasy – to *cultural* as well as to intra-psychic fantasy – is, precisely, the stage (stage in both senses, both the process and the playing space) of the transvestite" (1992: 339).

The Power of Cross-Dressing

Theatrical performance, which includes stand-up, has the potential to be symbolic:

> "Anything put on stage automatically assumes an aura of extra significance; it is apprehended in a manner which lends it greater meaning than when it is encountered outside the theatre. The simplest word or gesture delivered from a stage can rivet attention and evoke a host of emblematic, semiotic, metaphoric and, of course, symbolic possibilities"

(Senelick 2000: 7).

In the chapter on `The Cross-Dresser` it was established that the confusion of gender reading destabilises social gender roles, one of the fundamentals of western society. By appearing without a clear gender, or without gender at all, the transvestite performer is symbolic, representing a rejection of nature and society; "Drag is the theoretical and deconstructive social practice that analyzes these structures from within, by putting in question the "naturalness" of gender roles through the discourse of clothing and body parts" (Garber 1992: 151). Solomon looks at the nature of female-to-male cross-dressing in drama: "But in the theater, which by its very nature can investigate and undo conventions of representation, women in drag can do far more than display their legs; they can call into question the social conventions of gender roles and gender representation, and, as a result, the very category of gender" (in Ferris 1993: 146). Both Garber and Solomon are saying how transvestite performance can destabilise the very nature of gender. By doing this the performer is removing preconceptions, preventing the audience from being able to guess or predict what they are about to see and hear. This is particularly interesting when used in stand-up comedy if we examine how it affects the audience, looking back to the four effects I proposed in the chapter on `The Comedian`. The first effect, of individuality and identification, is certainly present, as being cross-dressed is uncommon, so memorable. The second effect, of being a signpost

for a character comedian, could be used here. Many cross-dressed comedians are playing characters, so being paired with a feminine or masculine name to match the gender as which they are dressed, they could show the audience that they are playing a character. However, comedians such as Eddie Izzard who are offstage transvestites as well as onstage transvestites, are not indicating character, just being true to themselves and dressing as they wish. The audience may think they are about to watch a character, but they are not, and the best way to indicate this is to use a name which is suitable for the gender of the performer, rather than suitable to their outfit. There is an ambiguity here, such as is present in all transvestite performance, and this leads the audience to "see multiple meanings in the very act of reading itself, of listening, watching a performance" (Ferris 1993: 8). Ferris takes this further to say that "[a]s spectators of transvestite theater we are the Barthesian "producers" of text extraordinaire. We are forced to concede to multiple meanings, to ambiguities of thought, feeling, categorization, to refuse closure" (1993: 8). If a cross-dressed comedian uses material related to transvestism or gender issues, they would be employing the third effect in my list, using their appearance to complement their material and persona. And lastly, the same cross-dressed comedian could use no related material at all, which could produce the fourth effect: their appearance and persona working in juxtaposition. Of course, as was discovered through my practice, none of these effects would occur if the audience is not aware that the performer is cross-dressing.

One of the reasons drag performance is so well-suited to stand-up comedy is proposed by Garber: "I have begun to see [transvestism]...as in many ways normative: as a condition that very frequently accompanies theatrical representation when theatrical self-awareness is greatest" (1992: 353). I would argue that stand-up is the theatrical mode with the greatest amount of self-awareness, making it the perfect mode for transvestite performance. Peacock here demonstrates how vital self-awareness is for the comic performer: "the clown *has* to be aware that he is aware, as it is this awareness that facilitates a direct communication with the audience" (2009: 11).

If stand-up is a perfect home for transvestite performance, and comedians are afforded comedic licence which allows them to do or say anything, then stand-up provides an arena in which a transvestite can do or say anything. Given the taboo surrounding transvestites, there are not many places, historically, that they have such freedom. The African American comedian of the 1960s and '70s Flip Wilson, found great success when

dressed as a woman: "the black male comedian was here empowered by his female double. "Geraldine" could speak when "Flip Wilson" deemed it prudent to remain silent; she could get away with things that were still transgressive for him" (Garber 1992: 298). Despite not being an offstage transvestite (as far as is known), Wilson used cross-dressing to grant him licence which he did not have as a black man in male clothing. Cross-dressing's destabilising qualities put the performer in a neutral state in which they have no pre-existing status or condition that might prevent them licence. Senelick applies this idea to women, and to how men in women's clothing are able to say things that women can't (without facing controversy or upsetting sensibilities): "As a man, [Bert] Savoy could get away with playing a brazen hussy who reveled in her libidinousness in a way no woman could" (1992: 35-6). This is slightly different, in that Savoy would have had the same freedom whether dressed as a man or as a woman, as he was a white man so already granted privilege. For women, it has been established that they are assuming a higher status when dressing in men's clothing, so in theory can enjoy more licence than they do when dressed in women's clothing.

In the section about female comedians dressing androgynously we have found that some comedians, such as Jo Brand, found androgynous clothing helped them draw attention away from their gender, removing the perceived disadvantage that there is in being a woman on the stand-up's stage. There is some ambiguity however, as to whether or not this is cross-dressing. Despite the fact that trousers are now made for women and for men, they are historically male clothing, and are still somewhat gendered clothing even now, and as such, it could be argued that any woman wearing trousers is cross-dressing. If this is the case, "a female cross-dressing entertainer would have to go a very long way into adopting a male persona before she would be much different from her audience" (Diana Simmonds in Maitland 1986: 102). Perhaps female comedians dressing androgynously is a way of them obtaining a status (and therefore licence) closer to that of a man's than a woman's, but without having to adopt such an extreme guise that their performance becomes drag and takes on a symbolic level. For "transvestism creates culture, produces and is produced by the Symbolic" (Garber 1992: 49).

Practical Use

Theoretically, it can be concluded that the use of cross-dressing in stand-up comedy can be used to push boundaries, to allow the comedian the licence to say or do whatever they wish, no matter how controversial. This is achieved through the use of the comedian's outsider status partnered with the transvestite's position within society as being representative of an "other", a "third". This combination sets the performer apart from an audience, allowing him or her to be able to speak and do things the audience cannot. Through this power, the transvestite comic can subvert and undermine societal norms, break taboos and possibly even evoke social change.

My first two shows as part of this project were very much experiments in the *feeling* of transvestite performance, in managing to find a way to use it in combination with my material and my persona to create a new style of performance for myself. One of my aims before embarking on this process was to develop my performance practice, hoping it would help me create new material and break away from the physical appearance that had become habit. The *Nick Ward* show was helpful in developing my understanding of gender impersonation and informing the direction of this project, but it did little to develop my practice outside of this project. The *Monkeyshine* performance helped me find a way of cross-dressing onstage which didn't make me as ill-at-ease as it had done previously, by presenting a persona instead of a character, and proving the importance of the audience's awareness of cross-dressing to the effectiveness of the cross-dressing (in terms of symbolism and poignancy). The *Final Show*, for me, was about trying some different ideas and theories I had had. In particular, I wanted to appear as a non-gendered person so that I could talk about gender issues without the connotations and preconceptions that come with either sex talking about those things. It was also important to me that I demonstrate a woman *parodying* men, and doing so with *admiration*: two things I had read to the contrary and wanted to disprove in my practice, and I believe I did.

The *Lady Luck* performance was different because I had not intended to include it as part of this thesis. However, since that gig, and since having performed the set on other occasions, I have come to realise that this set is evidence of the change in direction of my performance style; it is representative of my personal, practical conclusion to this project.

I have learnt that my costume can be used in conflict with my material to create humour, and this is perfectly demonstrated throughout this show: I doubt anyone expected the cheerful woman wearing a hand-knitted *The Little Mermaid* jumper to say the word "butt-plug", followed by a giggle. The word on its own is not funny, but the reaction of the audience proves that it was humorous, and it is probable that the humour came from the juxtaposition of material to my appearance.

What has been most revelatory for me has been the freedom I have gained as a result of my experiments with transvestite performance. I have been able to break away from preconceptions, both the audience's and my own. By presenting myself without gender, as someone without category, I was able to remove any of the connotations attached, allowing me complete freedom. Having experienced such liberty my mind started opening to the many possibilities and opportunities available to me, and I felt able, for the first time, to use material more personal, revelatory and potentially humiliating than ever before. This new material has proved to be very successful, and its effect has given me growing confidence in using it. I am confident that my practice is going in a new direction, resulting from my experiments with cross-dressing, and using costume to help create the desired effect of speaking about risqué subjects.

I believe, from my experience and theoretical research, that the freedom gained by cross-dressing in stand-up can be most commonly used to great effect by female stand-up comedians. It is not to say that no one else would benefit from it, just that more women would. In fact, I think to some extent all comedians would benefit from the freedom of expression I found, but women would be most likely to have a similar reaction to me. This is partly because I am a woman as well, but also because women are marginalised within the world of stand-up comedy, so have more to gain. It should not be that all female comedians go through the same process as me, trying different modes of cross-dressing, but by playing with their idea of their own gender and experimenting with the way they dress, they may find a neutrality that affords them the licence they lack. There is eternal hope that this inequality between men and women (in whatever area) will cease to exist, but it is still present in the world of comedy. In 1985 Mintz noted that, "It seems likely [...] that these female comics are voicing changing attitudes about gender roles" (1985: 75), and while the situation of women has definitely changed since then, there are still inequalities between men and women. By using androgynous and

masculine clothing, as well as transvestism, women can address the issues of their given gender, comment on social inequality, and help to instigate social change. Thompson noted that, " The next phase in the ongoing process of female liberation [...] is the colonization of cultural enjoyments that were once almost exclusively male preserves" (2004: 344). Interestingly, four hundred years ago transvestite performance was an exclusively male preserve (the boy players of the Renaissance stage), and apart from the odd spate of female drag performance (breeches roles, the Principal Boy in the pantomime, and the male impersonator of the music halls), it has remained an almost exclusively male preserve, at least in popular entertainment.

This project has looked at the impact of cross-dressing performance from my own perspective as a female stand-up comedian. I deliberately chose not to talk to other female performers as I did not want their experiences to cloud my own interpretations and instincts. However, in order to take this research further, I would propose widening the research base to include other female performers who regularly dress in male-gendered attire. For example: character actors, character comedians, impersonators, drag kings or androgynous stand-ups. Gauging their perceptions on how costume can affect their performance would broaden the impact of this research. By conducting one-on-one interviews with modern performers, I would hope to further the foundations set out in this paper.

Reference List

Akhtar, Nadeem *How `drag kings` are taking the standup world by storm*, The Guardian Online 26th August 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/shortcuts/2012/aug/26/drag-kings-standup-women-comedy (last accessed 14/10/2013)

Banks, Morwenna & Swift, Amanda (1987) *The Joke's On Us: Women in comedy from music hall to the present day*, London: Pandora Press

Benedictus, Leo *Where are all the female standups?* The Guardian Online 20th March 2012 http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/mar/20/female-standup-comedy-void

Bennett, Steve *Nicola Bolsover at the 2009 Chortle Student Comedy Awards Final* Chortle 6th September 2009 http://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/n/33519/nicola_bolsover

Burnett, Dean *Why do people believe women aren't funny?* The Guardian Online 11th February 2014 http://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2014/feb/11/women-arent-funny-why-do-people-believe-this

Cook, William (1994) *Ha Bloody Ha: Comedians Talking*, London: Fourth Estate

Dillon-Trenchard, Peter *Pete's Comedy Odyssey: Nicola Bolsover, Geek Night Out, Helen Keen, Richard Herring, Josie Long* Den of Geek 22nd February 2010 http://www.denofgeek.com/other/12875/petes-comedy-odyssey-nicola-bolsover-geek-night-out-helen-keen-richard-herring-josie-long#ixzz2x7LocskZ

Double, Oliver (1997) *Stand-Up! On Being a Comedian*, London: Methuen

Double, Oliver (2005) *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-Up Comedy* London: Methuen

Douglas, Mary (1970) `Jokes` in *Implicit Meanings 2nd Edition*, London: Routledge (1999)

Ferris, Lesley (ed.) (1993) *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London: Routledge

Fisher, John (1973) *Funny Way to be a Hero*, London: Frederick Muller

Freud, Sigmund (1933) *Femininity* in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, general editor James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1964) 22: 113

Garber, Marjorie (1992) *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, London: Penguin

Hamilton, Marybeth (ed.) Ferris, Lesley (1993) *"I'm the Queen of the Bitches": Female impersonation and Mae West's* Pleasure Man, *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London: Routledge

Howard, Jean E. (ed.) Ferris, Lesley (1993) *Cross-Dressing, the Theater, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England*, *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London: Routledge

Lee, Stewart (2010) *How I Escaped My Certain Fate: The Life and Deaths of a Stand-Up Comedian*, London: Faber & Faber Ltd

Maitland, Sara (1986) *Vesta Tilley*, London: Virago Press Ltd.

Malloy, John T (1977) *The Woman's Dress for Success Book*, New York: Warner Books

Marc, David (1989) *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*, Boston: Unwin Hyman

Mintz, Lawrence E. (1985) *Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation*, American Quarterly, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 71-80

Peacock, Louise (2009) *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance*, Bristol: Intellect Books

Senelick, Laurence (ed.) Ferris, Lesley (1993) *Boys and Girls Together: subcultural origins of glamour drag and male impersonation on the nineteenth-century stage, Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London: Routledge

Senelick, Laurence (2000) *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*, London: Routledge

Solomon, Alisa (ed.) Ferris, Lesley (1993) *It's Never Too Late to Switch: Crossing Toward Power, Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London: Routledge

Suthrell, Charlotte (2004) *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-dressing and Culture*, Oxford: Berg

Thompson, Ben (2004) *Sunshine on Putty: The Golden Age of British Comedy from Vic Reeves to The Office*, Fourth Estate: London

Tushingham, David (ed.) (1995) *Live 2: Not What I Am – The Experience of Performing*, London: Methuen

Woolf, Virginia (1928) *Orlando*, EPub edition 2013, Canada: HarperCollins

Zoglin, Richard (2008) *Comedy at the Edge: How Stand-up in the 1970s Changed America*, New York: Bloomsbury

Bibliography

Allen, Tony (2002) *Attitude: The Secret of Stand-Up Comedy* Glastonbury: Gothic Image

Cheshire, D.F. (1974) Music Hall in Britain, Newton Abbot: David & Charles (Holdings) Limited

Double, Oliver (1997) *Stand-Up! On Being a Comedian*, London: Methuen

Double, Oliver (2012) *Britain Had Talent*, Palgrave Macmillan

Felstead, S. Theodore (1946) *Stars Who Made The Halls*, London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd.

Izzard, Eddie (2002) *Circle*, Universal Pictures UK (DVD)

Izzard, Eddie (2003) *Sexie*, Universal Pictures UK (DVD)

McCarthy, Emma (2013) *Walk Like a Man*, Evening Standard 8th January 2013

Senelick, Laurence (ed.) (1992) *Gender in Performance: The presentation of difference in the performing arts*, Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England