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Fashion and Sexual Identity, or Why Recognition Matters

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Fashion and Sexual Identity, or Why Recognition Matters

Samantha Brennan

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Why should political philosophers think about fashion? What is political about our individual style and fashion choices? I am a feminist political philosopher who is interested in exploring questions about the political and ethical significance of fashion in the context of debates about sexual citizenship, identity politics, and rights to recognition. My thoughts in this area are shaped partly by debates about the political strategy of visibility in advancing the cause of gay, lesbian, and bisexual equality and partly by my own personal experiences in the area of sexual orientation and fashion. By the end of the exploration I hope to have persuaded you that political philosophers ought to think about fashion and its implications and that fashion raises some difficult and interesting questions in political philosophy.

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In a way it is odd to think about fashion in the context of political philosophy because philosophers as a group have not taken fashion at all seriously. Indeed, there is a remarkable degree of disdain in the attitude of philosophers to such trivial, superficial, and unworthy matters as clothing, footwear, and hairstyles (to name just three areas in which standards of fashion are thought to apply). This chapter talks about fashion in the broad sense insofar as it is concerned with how we dress and adorn ourselves. I do not reserve talk of fashion for “high fashion” or cutting edge, runway worthy fashion. But I am not so broad as to include all aspects of our lives to which fashionable standards might apply. One can talk about fashionable noses (in a world where cosmetic surgery is common) or fashionable ideas or fashionable neighborhoods. These fashionable things are beyond the scope of this essay. So it is both “low” and “high” fashion that

interests me but I restrict my interests to clothing and footwear choices, make up, and hairstyles.

In an essay in the feminist philosophy journal *Hypatia* called “Dressing Down, Dressing up: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion,” Karen Hanson takes on philosophers’ fear of fashion. She notes that the disdain for talking about clothing is interesting, and almost certainly gendered, since philosophers have no difficulty conversing about food, music, and household furnishings.¹ At a dinnertime gathering of philosophers the conversation is as likely to be about wine or recent films as it is to be about abiding philosophical problems. While these are allowed as acceptable topics for discussion among academics, what to wear to a faculty council meeting and the reception at the president’s house that follows is not.² Raising the topic of what this summer’s dresses will be like or what one thinks of the clothes featured in a particular television show, say *Mad Men*, for example, is even worse. One who dares broach the topic will have confessed an interest in a subject that the group agrees bespeaks vanity or worse. Thomas H. Benton, in his account of trying to dress formally as a professor, accounts for the hostility towards thinking about fashion in terms of income: “Professors (in the humanities, at least) don’t make much money relative to other professionals, so we press our sour grapes into the sweeter wine of smugness: “We are too important to pay attention to such trivial, privileged matters as clothing.” “One day you put on a tie, the next day you are driving a Hummer and voting Republican.”³ But it can’t just be money and politics that explains our contempt for caring about clothing for the fear of fashion extends to well-paid academics and includes those whose political allegiances are beyond reproach.

Indeed, Hanson claims that the philosophical disdain for concern with clothing extends back to Plato. “The healthy state” that Socrates describes in Book II of the *Republic* has citizens in “summer for the most part unclad and unshod and in the winter clothed and shod sufficiently”; and this community remains content with simple garb, with a simple life, as they “hand on a like life to their offspring.”⁴ But nothing is as simple as it seems and philosophers ought to be wary of

claims about what is simple and natural. Writes Hanson: "Clothing is a part of our difficult, post-Edenic lives; and dress, stationed at a boundary between self and other, marking a distinction between private and public, individual and social, is likely to be vexed by the forces of border wars. Philosophers, those who believe that the life worth living is the examined life, should find that willful ignorance of these matters ill suits them."⁵ I like Hanson's focus on fashion as sitting on the fence between public and private and between the individual and social. Fashion, as an enterprise is an activity one undertakes keeping in mind both personal style and the need to communicate with others to others.

One might think you would do better consulting feminist philosophers if you were interested in fashion and political philosophy. After all, feminists typically have a much broader lens for critical interest, seeing many things worthy of scrutiny that others have dismissed as philosophically uninteresting. Feminist philosophers got us to see the everyday lives of men and women as philosophically interesting for the role that gender socialization and enforced gender norms played in shaping women's and men's lives. The slogan "the personal is political" indicated that much of what seemed purely personal had in fact a political element and this was worthy of feminist attention. So feminists and feminist philosophers have not totally ignored fashion. However, feminist work on fashion has largely been critical of fashion as a tool of male domination. Feminists have rightly noticed how many fashion trends have the effect of making women's bodies less mobile and less physically powerful. From corsets and high heels to burkas and bound feet, fashion trends targeted at women around the world seem inextricably linked with the sexual exploitation of women by men.⁶ The combination of misogynist fashion with capitalism leads to further sources of feminist outrage. Feminist political theorists examine the global sweatshops where most 'fashionable' clothes are produced. Feminist economists calculate the 'beauty tax' -- the extra cost borne by women maintaining the minimal standards of beauty required to attract a partner and keep a job. Women also pay more than men for a wide range of everyday items. Sometimes this is explicit such as in the different price attached to dry

cleaning a men's versus a women's shirt, and the different prices for cutting men's and women's hair, while at other times it is just the case that products likely to attract women or marketed to women cost more than similar products likely to attract men or marketed to men.⁷ So it is no wonder feminist philosophers have run from the subject of fashion -- hands in the air, screaming -- preferring to leave it alone and not think about it too much. We feminist philosophers have had a disdain for taking fashion seriously that I want to suggest is mistaken.

In a very interesting book called *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Feminism and Fashion* Linda Scott raises troubles for the feminist preference for women's natural appearance. The "natural" is a difficult category to pin down and the boundaries between "natural" and "socially constructed" can be hard to locate. The feminist tendency to prefer a certain style as natural can raise difficulties for women whose shapes and bodies don't so easily fit. "As long as we ignore the fact that all women also belong to other groups -- different classes, races, and religions -- we can turn a blind eye to the reality that some women have advantages over others and have in the past, acted alongside men of their own class to secure those privileges. By asserting that all women must dress the same way -- conform to the same "ideal" -- we make a space where we can overlook their unequal access to the goods used in grooming and dress, as well as the ethnic differences that cause each group to view particular items, colors, or methods as acceptable, beautiful, or immoral."⁸

Let me give some examples of the sort of thing that is meant here. We academic feminists have a preference for a certain look. I can often spot other women headed to the same conference as me at airports, even if we haven't met. Here are some clues. For the most part we have "wash and go" hair. Elaborate hairstyles are rare. But how easy and acceptable "wash and go" hair is depends on race and on income. A very good haircut (usually combined with expensive styling products) makes our tousled hairstyles possible. The same is true for our preference for our low heeled, understated comfortable shoes that are themselves often far more expensive than trendy alternatives.

Here is another example of unnoticed privilege related to fashion, from the work of a disability theorist. In the discussion period which followed her paper "Your Wheelchair Is So Slim: A Meditation on the Social Enactment of Beauty and Disability" Samantha Walsh talked about her choice to wear high heels and fishnets which she finds makes it easier for people to see her as an adult.⁹ Dressed in ordinary clothes she is often mistaken for a child but the contrast between "child" and "fishnets" is so stark that this fashion strategy is an easy way for her to get the privilege that able-bodied women take for granted.¹⁰ Prior to hearing Walsh's paper I confess that it had not occurred to me that the extra steps disabled women must make to be seen as adult sexual beings include choices about hosiery and heels. In this case fashion works as a communicative strategy, this time against the predominant stereotypes of disability. According to Diane Richardson, there are special problems for disabled citizens in accessing the rights of sexual citizenship. She writes: "Stereotypes of disability, for example, include assumptions of asexuality; of lack of sexual potential. While historically there has been minimal discussion of the sexual politics of disability, both within disability studies and work on sexuality, in recent years attempts have been made to place sexual rights on the political agenda of disability movements ... A particular focus has been the ways in which people with disabilities have been denied the capacity for sexual feeling and rights to sexual expression."¹¹

Not worrying about fashion, or claiming to, is itself a sign of privilege. Sometimes this is because one has so thoroughly tutored oneself in certain norms they become invisible. But outsiders need to learn them. The studied casual look that most academics sport can be as difficult to get just right as the most formal of suits. And even when male academics get it wrong -- as for example, when they wear socks with sandals or white tube socks with dark suits -- they can afford not to care for very little or nothing rides on their appearance. Within academia, women worry more than men about how to dress for our roles. Men might find this trivial but they are not so often in the position of being mistaken for administrative staff, or in the case of young women professors, graduate students. The power of role and rank in decisions about

personal appearance was brought home to me recently when I became a full professor (capital "P" Professor unmodified as opposed to Assistant Professor and then Associate Professor) and decided to get several tattoos. Prior to attaining the rank of Professor I would not have said that I dressed to fit in the academic community but once I was promoted I found myself reconsidering my options in the realm of personal presentation. The thought "What can they do? I'm a Professor" has come up often enough that I can see that my former view, that I was not trying to fit in, was based on self-deception.

]ha[The Sexual Citizen, Rights of Recognition, and Visibility as a Strategy

]p[Having established that fashion matters and that philosophers ought to care, I want to think about fashion in the context of sexual citizenship, rights of recognition, and the strategy of visibility. Let's start with the concept of the sexual citizen. Moral and political philosophy in the liberal tradition has typically described citizens in the language of abstract and idealized personhood. On this account, the citizen is perfectly rational and autonomous and finds his/her home in the public realm. Feminists have criticized this concept of the disembodied citizen as either smuggling in norms of masculinity (and so not really abstract at all) or as impossibly unrealistic as the basis on which to build moral and political theory. Queer theorists likewise criticized the liberal citizen as attached to the norms of heterosexuality and as entrenching the public/private divide. Insofar as gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights claims get voice in the liberal account it is in the public realm -- in the workplace, the legislature, the courtroom -- and all mention of sexuality itself is left at home in the private. But this ignores public expressions of queer sexuality and allows in gay, lesbian, and bisexual moral and political agency only when sexuality is abstracted away. In contrast to the abstract citizen of liberal political philosophy, the alternative account of the citizen, the sexual citizen moves in the public realm as a sexual being.

According to *GLBTQ Encyclopedia of Culture*, the “sexual citizen” bridges the private and public, and stresses the cultural and political sides of sexual expression. Sexual privacy cannot exist without open sexual cultures. Homosexuality might be consummated in the bedroom, but first partners must be found in the public space of streets, bars, and media such as newspapers and the internet.”¹² Cultural theorist Jeffrey Weeks puts the point this way: “The ‘sexual citizen’ is a recent phenomenon. Making private claims to space, self-determination and pleasure, and public claims to rights, justice and recognition.” Weeks writes that the sexual citizen is a hybrid being, who tells us a great deal about political and cultural transformation and new possibilities of the self and identity.¹³

Political theorists writing about citizenship have identified two aspects of citizenship. The first is about rights, such as equal access to institutions and equal status before the law. The second is about recognition: the establishment of a political relationship and being recognized as a fellow citizen. Shane Phelan argues that barriers to citizenship for gays and lesbians, and other sexual minorities, are often found in this second category:

[ex]In contrast with most women and racial minorities, sexual minorities have a varying ability to be hidden, to leave their difference “suppressed or left uncertain.” And this is how many, if not most, heterosexuals would like them to remain. Many who express support for the legal rights of sexual minorities nonetheless express desire that “those people” keep their difference invisible.¹⁴

[p]Phelan writes that within a heterosexual world, heterosexuality is presumed: just as white is a default category among whites, seemingly “unraced” or neutral, heterosexuality is a position that is so unremarkable among heterosexuals that it becomes invisible as a structure.¹⁵ Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are thus accused of “flaunting” when we make our sexuality obvious but heterosexuality can be enacted and go unremarked. In Phelan’s words, “Thus many

heterosexuals express a tolerance for homosexuals, but object to 'flaunting it,' arguing that they not make a public display of their own sexuality. In fact, however, every marriage ceremony, every coffee break discussion, every induction exam is a site for heterosexual display." Thus the political strategy of visibility had a certain necessity to it. According to Phelan, a group that is consistently present only as the opposite or outside the nation, that has no part in the national imaginary except as threat, cannot participate in citizenship, no matter what rights its members have come to enjoy.¹⁶

As a strategy visibility is connected to the quest for rights of recognition. One of the main rights claimed on behalf of the sexual citizen is the right of recognition. Queer theorists have argued that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals do not merely want the same rights as the sexual majority. Rather a large part of what the queer community wants is to be recognized as having legitimate identity. That is, queer activists want to be recognized as queer citizens. Lisa Walker writes: "Privileging visibility has become a tactic of late twentieth-century identity politics, in which participants often symbolize their demands for social justice by celebrating visible signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination."¹⁷

Some people object at this point that sexuality and sexual orientation are private matters. But only from the perspective of the privileged sexual orientation is sexuality private. We need to find ways to communicate our sexual orientation to others for a wide range of purposes, not the least of which is the burden of continual explanation. Sexuality is also a legal matter. Even within the liberal state there are a wide range of laws regulating sexuality. These laws -- even when we agree with them -- still shape the range of permissible sexual acts and lifestyles. Sexuality is also a cultural matter. Recognition as a sexual citizen, being seen as a group member, being able to speak as a member of a group, is often not something an individual can will to do. Recognition will depend on issues of power, appearance, and context.

Let me give an example, familiar to most people with an alternative gender or sexual identity. It is relatively easy can be seen and identified as a queer femme in Toronto or San

Francisco while in smaller towns and cities, such an option doesn't exist. A queer femme takes on a gender identity which is in some respects traditionally or stereotypically feminine while at the same time having a queer sexual identity. Queer femininity is usually more accentuated and intentional than a straight female gender identity or gender presentation and often challenges standards of femininity through exaggeration, parody, or transgression of gender norms. But to dress in a feminine fashion is, in some locations, outside urban areas, to invite being misread as straight. To understand this point we need to return to the point that fashion occurs at the boundary of the personal and the political, at the edge between private and public. Fashion achievements require the right community. It can never be an individual enterprise. Here are some more examples to help make this point. You can't wear a trucker cap ironically in a community in which trucker caps are worn seriously. Successful irony requires the right set of background conditions. Fishnets and combat boots only work as a fashion statement when you're somewhere people won't just assume you cannot afford heels or that you have made a mistake. While the identity "boi" is easily available in urban settings, the best you might manage in other environments is baby butch. (A boi is a transgendered/androgynous/masculine person who is biologically female and presents themselves in a young, boyish way, according to the urban dictionary.) This is also generation specific. There were no bois when I came out in the 1980s. Trans and other gender queer identities are now more easy to access and live. Could you have been a boi in the 1980s? In the absence of a community which recognizes and affirms your identity, probably not. Likewise, you can stuff your pockets with colored hankies all you want but in the absence of a leather community with shared understanding of what various colors and their placement mean regarding your sexual preferences, you aren't flagging. You're just wearing a hanky in your pocket. (One can also make the point that you couldn't create your own hanky code with your own meanings attached to the various colors. Such efforts would be meaningless. Call this Wittingstein's "private hanky" argument.) All of these examples are just to make the point that fashion is essentially communicative and what is possible as identity will

depend in part on what identity categories exist in the community in which you find yourself.

The lesson here is that being out and being visible is easier for some than for others. In her book *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity*, Lisa Walker tackles this problem from the perspective of lesbian identity and the problem of recognition for women who are lesbians but who aren't seen as such. In Walker's chapter, "How to Recognize a Lesbian," she argues that there are both benefits and costs to strategies of visibility. Walker focuses on the identity issues facing lesbians who identify as femme. There are many statements of femme identity in various new collections of essays about femme -- see for example, *Visible: A Femmethology* Volumes 1 and 2, and *Brazen Femme, A Femme's Guide to the Universe*¹⁸ -- but I find the most poignant expression of the costs of being femme in an essay by the butch author Ivan Coyote. In a piece entitled "Hats Off to Beautiful Femmes" Ivan Coyote writes:

[ex]I know that sometimes you feel like nobody truly sees you. I want you to know that I see you. I see you on the street, on the bus, in the gym, in the park. I don't know why I can tell that you are not straight, but I can. Maybe it is the way you look at me. Please don't stop looking at me the way you do ... I would never say that the world is harder on me than it is you. Sometimes you are invisible. I have no idea what this must feel like, to pass right by your people and not be recognized. To not be seen ... I want to thank you for coming out of the closet. Again and again, over and over, for the rest of your life. At school, at work, at your kid's daycare, at your brother's wedding, at the doctor's office. Thank you for sideswiping their stereotypes.¹⁹

]p[While Walker's work examines visibility from the perspective of the femme lesbian, there are other issues tied to recognition and visibility. Recognition is an important theme in queer culture and queer politics. Note that recognition has two aspects. First, there is

recognition by the members of one's own group. This can matter even more in contexts in which public recognition is too dangerous and so systems of secret signals develop, such as wearing a single earring in a particular ear. It still matters though even in contexts in which secrecy is not important and even if you think it does not matter. Consider that there is a definite loss when that sense of recognition disappears. I think of my own experiences travelling and what it was like to find that in some countries I could not recognize lesbians as lesbians. In certain places in the world it seemed to me that no one was queer. In still other places, my mistakes went the other way. It seemed to me that most of the women looked queer. This mattered to me more than I thought it ought to. Second, there is recognition by a larger community and this can be more difficult to accomplish as it requires education of the part of a larger group. Coyote and Walker are talking about both kinds of recognition in their discussions of femme invisibility. In this chapter I am mostly talking about recognition as a single phenomenon though the reality is much more complex.

One way we recognize one another is by dressing like a dyke. But what do lesbians wear? Debate about lesbian fashion esthetics opened up recently in Canada in the light of Canada's first lesbian clothing store, Boutique Mad-ame. The store opened in Montreal in 2006 and closed a couple of years later. On the store website the store's owner posed the question, "What is a lesbian esthetic?"²⁰ She notes that obviously lesbians were dressing themselves before the store opened and there certainly isn't a dyke uniform. Criteria for inclusion in the store were a disjunct of various political criteria. All the store's items were either organic, fair trade, made or designed in Quebec, or designed by a lesbian. The store also offered tailoring and aimed to take into account a wide range of sizes and varying gender expressions. Owner Amy Skinner was proud that her store also offered a queer friendly shopping environment. "There are places where it is not comfortable to shop with your girlfriend," she said. "If you're looking at men's clothes, you often get quips from sales staff that the clothes you're looking at are for men and you can't try on men's clothes in the men's changing rooms. Most of the

lesbians I've met say stores don't address their particular interests."

The mainstream media has started to pay attention too to lesbian fashion. *Salon* ran a piece entitled "Rachel Maddow, reluctant sex symbol" and *The New York Times* Spring 2009 Women's Fashion Issue also talked about Maddow in their piece "Butch Fatale: Lesbian Glamour Steps Out Of The Closet." An article called "The Subtle Power of Lesbian Style," in the *New York Times* Style Issue drew attention to increasing numbers of queer women working in the fashion industry. "There are a lot of gay women working in fashion, obviously, and they approach it as gay women, and that fashion is then consumed by a much larger culture," Ms. Chaiken said. "What makes their work lesbian fashion? It is probably that they are celebrating that play with gender, that provocative style that pulls from rock 'n' roll, boy icons of the past, the street and the high-end couture type glamour, but that starts with a lesbian sensibility." We can add to this the recent increase in the visibility of lesbian stars on mainstream television, from kd lang to Maddow, to the women of the *L Word*.

Within the queer community, the debate continues over lesbian fashion. A recent issue of Canada's leftie alternative magazine *this magazine* featured an article entitled "The Lesbian Fashion Crisis," by Cate Simpson. She writes:

[ex]Contrary to popular belief, there is really no lesbian fashion aesthetic. There's a "look," but it is hard to quantify and even harder to emulate if you're a newcomer to the scene. It is one of those you-know-it-when-you-see-it things. And it only applies to the shorthaired stereotype-adhering among us; if you're high-femme, you're on your own. Queer women who come out in their 20s instead of in their teens seem to be hit hardest by the lesbian fashion crisis. I have more than one bisexual friend who -- accustomed to dressing up to get the attention of men on a Friday night -- is entirely at a loss when it comes to dressing for other women.

]p[Continues Simpson:

]ex[Part of the problem is that it is tough just to find clothes that fit you when you're boyish looking but shaped like a girl. Men's clothes are tentlike on us, but women's clothes are invariably too, well, woman-y. And those perfect-fitting men's-suits-cut-for-women Shane wears on *The L Word*? Those don't really exist. All of this has me wondering about the stickers that are available all through Pride Week with every conceivable sexual orientation written on them. It is as if, having shed our clothes and our coded messages about who we might sleep with, we are finally free to wear our identities on our sleeves.²¹

]p[The worry is that insofar as a lesbian aesthetic exists it seems to necessarily exclude those who do not know what it is or how to go about enacting it. In her paper "Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a lesbian habitus, space and culture," Alison Rooke explores themes of exclusion and inclusion in the lives of working-class lesbian and bisexual women (both transsexual and nontranssexual). Writes Rooke:

]ex[It is worth noting that the aestheticization of lesbian and gay identities and bodies into "lifestyle" ... had become more apparent in the past 20 years. The lesbian body politic has significantly changed since the 1980s and 1990s. The lesbian feminist critique of "patriarchy" was born out through embodied practices. The lesbian feminist body was unruly, questioning the discourses of appropriate femininity by sprouting hair, changing shape, refusing constraining clothes, and so on ... Lesbian feminist culture offered the opportunity to experiment and explore dominant conceptions of gender; it offered a space to rethink heteronormativity and for some the possibility to live, at least temporarily in space and time, outside of its bounds.²²

]p[But Rooke's working-class subjects were unable to fit in or to be recognized. "They fell short of a recognizable lesbian habitus in more embodied ways. They were not androgynous, gym toned, or tanned or were not displaying the appropriate haircuts. It was not merely that they did not wear the right labels. It was also the case that they did not possess the requisite cultural capital to know which brands should be worn even if they could afford them and how to wear them."²³

While the politics of recognition seems to call for visibility as a strategy, there are dangers on relying too heavily on visibility. Writes Walker:

]ex[While privileging visibility can be politically and rhetorically effective, it is not without its problems. Within the constraints of a particular identity that invests certain signifiers with political value, figures that do not present these signifiers are often neglected. Because subjects who can pass exceed the categories of visibility that establish identity, they tend to be understood as peripheral to the process of marginalisation ... The paradigm of visibility is totalizing when a signifier of difference becomes synonymous with the identity it signifies. In this situation, members of a given population who do not bear that signifier of difference, or who bear visible signs of another identity are rendered invisible and are marginalized within an already marginalized community.²⁴

]p[Susie Bright is quoted at the beginning of Walker's chapter on looking like a lesbian: "Of course, there's a strict gay dress code no matter where you cruise. At the height of my college cruising, I was attending Take Back the Night meetings dressed in Mr. Greenjeans overalls, Birkenstocks, and a bowl hair-cut that made me look like I'd just been released from a bad foster home. There is nothing more pitiful to look at than a closeted femme."

I would like to close this chapter with a piece of personal narrative, to tell a little bit about

my

own story around identity and appearance. I came out as a lesbian during university, in the 1980s. Making my own sexual identity known to the world was simple. I cut my hair, started wearing what 20-year-old lesbians in the 1980s were wearing -- jeans, t-shirts, converse sneakers, significant belts, and a single earring. My favorite earring was itself also a signifier of orientation. It was in the shape of a labrys, the double-sided ax associated with Amazon warriors. I was instantly recognizable and that mattered a lot to me. It mattered for the purpose of not getting hit on by men and for the purpose of being seen by the women who I wanted to notice me. Fashion mattered. Friends, family, and colleagues reading this know I recanted on the "excluding men" part of my sexual orientation many years ago and have identified as a bisexual for more than 20 years. But now in my mid-40s it is much harder to maintain any level of visibility. The challenges relate to two important aspects of my life: having a straight male partner and kids, and aging. Often when making the point really matters, I simply label myself to avoid confusion. I have a t-shirt that reads "bi" and I wore that when giving talks based on some of the material in this paper. I sometimes wear it to class to end speculation among students. I also had a pin that read, "I'm bisexual and I'm still not attracted to you" but I'm also a nice person and that pin seemed too mean spirited. I hate to hurt feelings. It is important to note that I do not describe myself as being in a heterosexual marriage. I would like our language here to change. Orientations apply to people and not relationships. Thus a same sex marriage need not be a gay marriage. It could well be a marriage of two bisexuals. The correct contrast to same sex marriage is opposite sex marriage. And so if what you mean by a heterosexual marriage is a marriage of two heterosexuals, then mine isn't such a marriage. Aging poses a different sort of challenge for recognition. On the one hand, many of my midlife women friends match various lesbian stereotypes. We tend to have short hair, wear comfortable shoes, often don't wear make up, and some of time seem to enjoy having escaped the male gaze. But it is also the case that women in midlife are often viewed as asexual so the categories of gender and sexual

orientation fail to apply in any interesting way. I continue to struggle with visibility and the burden of explanation. I do not expect these issues to go away anytime soon.

This chapter has sprawled over a lot of different topics and themes. All I hope to have established is that insofar as fashion sits at the boundary between public and private, it ought to be of significance for moral and political philosophers. In particular, I hope to have shown that fashion has a key role to play in the political strategy of queer visibility. Finally, I hope also to have shown that there are some difficulties with privileging the strategy of visibility.

Notes

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1 Karen Hanson, "Dressing Down Dressing Up -- The Philosophic Fear of Fashion," *Hypatia*, *Special Issue: Feminism and Aesthetics* 5 (1990): 107--121.

2 There are of course some exceptions. See "Dressing Like a Professor," on *Worn Through*, a fashion professor's blog, <http://www.wornthrough.com/2009/01/16/on-teaching-fashion-looking-like-a-professor/> (accessed December 7, 2010).

3 Thomas H. Benton, "The Year of Dressing Formally: An Academic in America," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54 (2008), in which a college English professor details his decision to build a wardrobe that is suitable to an academic with tenure.

4 Plato, *The Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 618--619.

5 Hanson, Karen. 1990. "Dressing down Dressing up -- The Philosophic Fear of Fashion," *Hypatia* 5 (1990): pp. 107 121, p. 119.

6 See, for example, Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (New York: Anchor, 1992).

7 For the most recent report on this topic see the January 2010 issue of *Consumer Reports* magazine according to which women pay more for a variety of drugstore items as well. Products directed at women, according to the article, might cost up to 50% more than similar products for men even when the ingredient list is the same.

8 Linda Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Feminism and Fashion*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 13.

9 Presented at the feminist philosophy graduate student conference Diotima, Fall 2009, The University of Western Ontario.

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10 The sexual rights of the disabled are discussed in Diane Richardson, "Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorizing Sexual Rights," *Critical Social Policy* 20 (2000): 105--135.

11 Richardson "Sexual Citizenship," p. 105.

12 GLBTQ Encyclopedia of Culture, <http://www.glbtc.com/>.

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13 Jeffrey Weeks, "The Sexual Citizen," *Theory Culture Society* 15 (1998): 35--52.

14 Shane Phelan, *Sexual Strangers: Gays, Lesbians, and Dilemmas of Citizenship* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 15.

15 Phelan, *Sexual Strangers* p. 35.

16 Phelan, *Sexual Strangers*, p. 7.

17 Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), p. 868.

18 Burke, Jennifer Clare. *Visible: A Femmethology* (Homofactus Press, 2009); Ulrika Dahl and Volcano Del LaGrace, *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities* (Serpent's Tail Press, 2009).

19 "Hats Off to Beautiful Femmes: Thank You for Looking at Me The Way You Do,"

Ivan E Coyote, National xtra / Thursday, July 30, 2009 (accessed August 1, 2009).

http://www.xtra.ca/public/National/Hats_off_to_beautiful_femmes-7215.aspx (accessed August 1, 2009).

20 <http://askthegeek.org/madame/> (accessed December 7, 2010).

21 Simpson, Cate. "Queerly Canadian #13: The Lesbian Fashion Crisis," May 28, 2009, *This* magazine, available at <http://this.org/blog/2009/05/28/queerly-canadian-lesbian-fashion/> [When was this last site accessed?]

22 Rooke, Alison. 2007. "Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus," *Space and Culture* 10 (2007): 231--252, pp. 246--247.

23 Rooke, "Navigating Lesbian Space," p. 247.

24 Walker, *Looking*, p. 868.