The Epistemology of the Fag Hag’s Closet – A

Dionysian Experience

A thesis submitted to the University of Western Sydney as fulfilment for
the degree of Masters Honours (Research)

Submitted: September, 2010

Written by: J. Starr
University of Western Sydney.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

.................................................................
(Signature)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank those people who have helped with this research project; your support and guidance has proved to be invaluable to me. Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Anna Gibbs who encouraged me to undertake this work and secondly, Dr. Maria Angel who has accompanied me on this rollercoaster ride from creative writing to theoretical research. I would also like to extend my eternal gratitude to Dr. David McInnes and Dr. Nemira Schick for their support as well as their expertise and experience in queer theories and politics. At times when my research seemed curioser and curioser, each of you helped to guide me through the maze of Wonderland and find my way home. Another important person who has offered me guidance and support throughout the years of this project and whom I now offer my sincere thanks is Dr. Melvyn Hill. In the very beginning of this study, it was Melvyn’s suggestion that the fag hag identity was bound up with a Dionysian experience of pleasure and pain that gave me the grounding for some of this research and also the title for this work.

I would also like to thank Ann Johannesson M.A. for her unfailing support and insight in the final months of this project. When I first met Ann, she had only just moved to Australia from Sweden and did not know what a fag hag was but thanks to her tireless efforts in helping me to edit this work she says she feels like an expert. I would also like to offer my sincere gratitude to the brave women who volunteered to answer my questions with honesty and integrity. I realise that some of the questions raised caused some of you to think about your relationships with family and friends in a new light but I am glad that you all agree that this research has helped you to understand yourselves better. I would also like to thank you for your constant messages, emails and phone calls offering encouragement and support when I sometimes lost heart with my writing.

Of course there are many other people who have taken this journey with me and at times I know I was difficult to live with. To my husband who has had to duck countless paper balls thrown across the room during moments of ‘writer’s block’ and to the rest of my family who have not been able to spend family time with me in a long time – I am now free to baby sit. I would also like to acknowledge the other fag hags and my gay male friends who have constantly reminded me how important my work is and what a difference it will make within queer theories.
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the fag hag identity in the gay nightclub and party culture. A fag hag is a woman who prefers the company of gay men and this particular alliance creates new opportunities for on-going discussions around an alternative politics of gender relations. This research is written from an autoethnographical view point using a qualitative methodological approach which includes interviews with other women who identify as fag hags. Chapter One begins with an introduction to the fag hag identity and a discussion of studies currently available as well as providing an overview of the following chapters. This chapter also includes an explanation of some of the theories used in the analysis of interviews and an introduction to the myths of Electra and Antigone which offer alternative ways of investigating family relationships to Freud’s oedipal theories. Chapter Two discusses the family relationships of the fag hag and uses material from interviews as well as my own experience and models from Greek mythology in order to investigate these family bonds. Chapter Three examines the fag hag’s inclusion in the gay nightclub and party culture as a safe space that allows for experimentation with her own performance of self.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE - THE FAG HAG

1.1 Background 1  
1.2 Methodology 6  
1.3 Literature 11  
1.4 Models and Representations 17  
1.5 Chapters 25

## CHAPTER TWO – FAMILY DYNAMICS OF THE FAG HAG

1.1 Rethinking Oedipus 27  
1.2 The Mother/Daughter Relationship 30  
1.3 The fag hag’s search for the empathic Other 35  
1.4 Adult relationships 39  
1.5 The Father/Daughter Relationship 42  
1.6 The sister and brother in Greek mythology 45  
1.7 The sister/brother relationship 49

## CHAPTER THREE – THE FAG HAG RELATIONSHIP

1.1 The fag hag and Shame. 55  
1.2 The Mirror 59  
1.3 Acceptance Love and Loyalty 63  
1.4 The Imaginary Father re-visited 66  
1.5 The Fag Hag in Heterotopia 72

## CONCLUSION

## APPENDIX

## BIBLIOGRAPHY
Chapter One – The Fag Hag

‘Age shall not wither her,
Nor custom stale her
Infinite variety’

William Shakespeare
(Antony and Cleopatra,
Act II, Scene II lines
271-272)

1.1 Background.

In November, 2007 with the help of my friend, Sofia (a pseudonym), I created a
website called Oz Fag Hags. The idea behind the website was to gather a group of
women who identified as fag hags for research in this project because I wanted to
learn more about the fag hag identity and investigate the reasons why some women
seem to identify with gay men. My aim in undertaking this project was to introduce a
new concept within identity politics that explains the benefits and cultural importance
of the relationship between women and gay men. The fag hag can lead the way for
discussion about a new kind of identity politics which Deborah Thompson (2004)
refers to as ‘identification politics’ (p. 40) and in doing so, the fag hag can introduce
new and innovative ways of discussing close relationships between women and gay
men. One of my most passionate dreams was to become involved in a Mardi Gras
Parade as a Fag Hag and as 2008 was the 30th Anniversary of Sydney Gay and
Lesbian Mardi Gras, I had no doubt that this would be the perfect year to fulfill that
dream. In addition to the website, my friend, Sofia, suggested that we start a group on
Facebook, a social networking site, in order to find other women who would be
interested in joining our float for the Mardi Gras parade. The response to this group
was as encouraging as the website - and to date there are over 240 people registered
on Facebook while the website receives approximately twenty visitors a week. So, on
1st March 2008, twenty Oz Fag Hags led by Sofia and myself made their inaugural
appearance in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in what I believe to be the
very first inclusion of the fag hag identity in the parade and the first public
acknowledgement of the fag hag as a member of the queer community. A year later, our numbers had doubled as we again made the pilgrimage to Oxford Street to join the parade. Mardi Gras 2009 was the biggest in the history of the parade attracting over 10,000 participants in 136 floats and individual entries. The parade was watched by 300,000 local and international spectators who lined the footpaths of Oxford Street watched by a global audience of millions (Hackney, 2009).

By 2010, the Oz Fag Hag entry had more than quadrupled in size, boasting 80 fag hags which included our own version of ‘Cher’ straddling a large black cannon on the back of a 5 tonne truck. While ‘Marilyn’ held her skirt down against the wind and ‘Bette’ saluted the crowd, some of the girls danced behind the Greek god, Dionysios, in a modern version of the ancient festival, the ‘City Dionysia’. Mardi Gras has much in common with the ‘City Dionysia’ which was a popular Roman festival held in honor of the god Dionysios. The ‘City Dionysia’ festival was held within the borders of the city of Athens taking place sometime between the end of March and beginning of April each year (Harris and Platzner, 2004). Many of the people who crowded into the city to take part in the ‘City Dionysia’ festivities wore grotesque masks and formed a long procession that consisted of a variety of groups and characters that were adorned in brilliant colours (Harris and Platzner, 2004). In many ways, Mardi Gras follows this tradition because it is usually held at the beginning of March each year and involves various community groups and individuals dressing for the occasion in elaborate costumes and masks.

Like a scene from Alice in Wonderland, people covered in feathers, glamorous outfits, celebrities, furry animals that walk on two legs, 7ft. tall drag queens with their faces hidden behind ornate masks, naked marchers with huge placards with political messages wind their way along Oxford Street. Fireworks and spotlights illuminate the marchers as they protest against the condemnation and discrimination of a society that values heterosexuality over homosexuality. Floats and banners highlight the fight for equality in same sex marriages, immigration rights and civil law. There are floats supporting the fight against homophobia, groups that represent civil partnerships, and others that protest against the intolerance of religions towards same sex relationships. On the other hand, Mardi Gras is also a celebration of self, a way of reclaiming the streets for gay people, a way of saying its OK to be gay! Dykes on bikes; drag queens
in satin; transsexuals in platform lace up boots, and even Dame Edna Everage’s double, banded together in order to show the world that gender is undoubtably a performance. In 2010 the fabulous femmes were followed by the ‘Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence’ making their way along the busy parade route but it was the Oz Fag Hags who were greeted with a standing ovation and deafening applause as they danced their way past the members and judges in the Bobby Goldsmith stand. It seems that when comedienne, Margaret Cho (2001) described fag hags as the ‘backbone of the gay community’ (p. 41) she was voicing not only her own opinion but also that of many others involved with the queer community. As we walked the 1.4 kilometres of the parade route, it felt like we were walking the red carpet on the Logie Awards night.¹

For many fag hags Mardi Gras means time out from the realities of everyday life. In most instances, fag hags tend to be invisible and as a result they are very hard to identify, but the Oz Fag Hag float seemed to coax some out of their hiding places so that they could publicly support their gay friends and tell the world that they, too, were proud to be a part of the queer community. Mardi Gras highlights inequalities in our society and, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) argues in relation to Carnival, it works by suspending ‘hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it - that is, everything resulting from sociohierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age)’ (pp.122-23). Bakhtin posits that, in medieval times, carnival and carnavalesque disputed and ridiculed the normal rules of order and morality in processions and plays using the theme of ‘the world turned upside down’ (p. 122). Carnival festivities showed low culture imitating high culture with pseudo kings, bishops, cross-dressing and parody in much the same way as Mardi Gras mocks religion, politics and gender today. Consequently, the Sydney Mardi Gras might be regarded as one way that the queer community can challenge existing authority regarding the politics associated with sexuality and gender. As such Mardi Gras has provided a public platform for the emergence of the fag hag identity. It seems to me that one reason that the Oz Fag Hag float was the first of its kind in the Mardi Gras parade is because the fag hag has not been given a political voice or any credibility within gay or straight culture. Even though the fag hag is now becoming visible in mainstream television shows and

¹ The Logie Awards are the Australian television industry awards.
movies, the story lines do not necessarily give her the kind of credibility that she deserves and it is my intention to rectify the misconceptions that surround her identification with gay men. It seems that there are some people who believe that the fag hag is an unattractive woman who can not attract a man or that the fag hag is either a closeted lesbian or secretly in love with her gay male friends. The media portrays fag hags as comic, tragic women who cling to gay men as substitutes for a ‘real’ relationship with a man.

I began this thesis with the purpose of introducing the fag hag as a new identity within queer theory and gender studies. Although the concept of women and their friendships with gay men is not necessarily new, it has not yet been taken seriously by academic discourse and as a result there is only a small amount literature available that can attest to the fag hag’s valuable contribution to both gay and heteronormative culture. As a transgressor of boundaries, the fag hag offers many possibilities for theoretical study but she does not fit neatly into one category of investigation. Consequently, there were a number of theories that needed to be applied to different aspects and characteristics of the fag hag in order to reach a logical explanation about, not only her performance of femininity, but also the reasons for her transgression, ambivalence and marginality. Some of these areas include, but are not limited to, gender relations, identity, subjectivity and psychoanalysis but, to date, the fag hag has mostly been the subject of comedy and the occasional mention in theories relating to gay men. As part of her unruly performance, the fag hag is credited with a loud voice and therefore she can speak out and help to create a bridge between two cultures that seem to be in continual debate with each other. The fag hag also unsettles patriarchal notions about female performance and therefore she is able to show other women that sexuality is just one aspect of identity.

The concept of patriarchy is important to this research and for the purpose of this study, I use Sylvia Walby’s (1989) concept of patriarchy based on her article ‘Theorising patriarchy’. In this article, Walby claims that ‘sexuality is an important patriarchal structure’ (p. 225) and explains that the meaning of patriarchy varies across different eras and cultures. My research uses Walby’s working definition of patriarchy as ‘a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women…the key set of patriarchal practices here is especially that
of [compulsory] heterosexuality’ (p. 225). As a result of this, patriarchal culture distinguishes masculinity and femininity in many ways through institutional discourses such as ‘religion, media and education’ (p. 227). Today, the media can be regarded as one example of the way that patriarchy defines what a woman should be and in most cases, this means woman is constituted as not only powerless but also object of the male gaze. Magazines such as Cleo, Cosmopolitan and Vogue promote images of young, beautiful, thin women and until recently, television shows and movies have generally portrayed women only as support characters for the male role. According to patriarchal values, masculinity and femininity are relationally dependant; therefore, to be properly masculine requires the properly feminine. But most fag hags do not perform a socially accepted feminine performance which suggests that they are unruly because they disrupt female stereotypes. According to Gilad Padva

…the unruly woman is one who does not conform to her ‘proper place’ and questions the primal social dichotomy between male and female through excess and outrageousness. In some cases, the unruly woman is characterized not only by assertiveness, a loud and raw manner of speaking, ordering others about and controlling the dialogue, but also by her large size, her masculine or androgynous appearance, and her domination (or attempted domination) of men (2006, p. 1).

Unruly women are uncomfortable performing an unequivocal feminine gender script, either physiologically, socially or politically, but prefer to blur the boundaries between feminine and masculine. In this way, fag hags might be considered to be ‘liminal entities’ which Victor Turner (1969) describes in his book, The ritual process, as ‘neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom…’ (p. 95). Turner also describes the social space that the fag hag occupies as liminal which offers ‘a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise’ (p. 95). Liminal spaces exist in-between boundaries and are places where different classes of people, different cultures and ways of being come together and represent a period of ambiguity (Turner, 1969). These spaces offer the fag hag a place of transition, a place where she can do things that she normally can not do anywhere else, and there is no one to
judge her. The fag hag questions the accepted gender performance of woman and also transgresses the boundaries between gay and straight so she unsettles categories and norms that relate to existing identities.

My research will show that today’s fag hag is a post-modern unruly woman who, in her disillusionment with patriarchal values, shuns their truths and power relations in order to take a position somewhere outside them. From her position between the borders of sexual identification, it seems fitting that the fag hag is the figure who can reveal new truths about identity and identification. In this liminal space, the fag hag becomes a transitional self who must undergo certain rites of passage in order to find her own identity and these rites are experienced through her inclusion in a gay community that operates around the concept of carnival and festival. In what seems to me like a re-writing of Louis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland, a woman leaves behind the false sense of self that she has gained through judgments and expectations placed on her by patriarchal beliefs and sexual trauma and enters into a liminal space. In this space, the woman meets some people who are not like the ones who have treated her so unjustly. Instead, they show her love and acceptance, release her from the shackles of patriarchal expectations and give her the freedom to be whoever she wants to be. So, the woman disappears into a darkness that is filled with music and dance and in this new world, she meets many curious and wonderful people who teach her how to grow into her own identity. This strange new world becomes home for a while, the people in it are her family and it is through identifying with these people that the woman can become a subject in her own life narrative and return to her real home. But the fag hag’s narrative is not a fairy tale; it is a serious project that acknowledges the benefits of the fag hag identity, not just for the woman but also for the gay man. It has become clear to me, during the course of my research that the fag hag relationship with gay men and their community is a coalition that creates the opportunity for serious discussion around an alternative politics of gender relations.

1. 2 Methodology

In this investigation, I use a qualitative methodological approach because as Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2005) explain in their book, The Sage handbook of qualitative research:
Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world [and consist of] the studied use and collection of a number of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions, observational; historical; interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives (p. 3).

Accordingly, my research consists of interviews with women who identify as fag hags and an analysis of those interviews using existing queer theories. Queer theory is concerned with the destabilization of ideas about identity and particularly sexual identity and, according to Donald Hall (2003) in his book *Queer theories*, ‘work to challenge and undercut any attempt to render “identity” singular, fixed or normal’ (p. 15). Hall uses the work of theorists such as Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler and Michel Foucault as a basis for some of his work but believes that although Sigmund Freud was influential in the early part of the twentieth century, his theories were directed towards compulsory heterosexuality.

Freud’s psychoanalysis used mythological models to explain familial relations, for example the myth of Oedipus, but it relies on the centrality of the father and is therefore not always relevant in the case of the fag hag. Accordingly I will also include Greek mythology but will rely on myths such as Electra and Antigone because these ancient legends can be used to provide models that might explain familial dynamics which are important to the fag hag identity. These texts will function as accessible accounts that can provide examples of the characteristics that create empathic bonds between women and gay men. The relationship that exists between gay men and women raises many questions and in order to find the answers to some of these it was necessary to speak with women whose lives are deeply entrenched in a gay community.

Over the past three years, the ‘Sydney GLBT Mardi Gras’ parade has provided me with an ideal opportunity to meet other women who identify with gay men and also to learn more about the identity that I once believed was unique to me. As part of this
research project, I decided to interview some of these women in order to answer many of the questions that have yet to be asked in existing studies. I also wanted to learn about the significance of this identity to not only the queer community but also the women who proudly dwell on the boundary between gay and straight worlds. The women who had joined the Mardi Gras float had read about my research on the Oz Fag Hag website and many of them volunteered their experiences as a part of this study. I had also asked for volunteers by posting a message on the Facebook website and over the next couple of weeks I received replies from women on a global scale. It seems that the fag hag identity is adopted by women all over the world and they were just as excited about my research as those from the Mardi Gras parade.

The initial response was overwhelming and far too large for me to include all volunteers in this project, so I selected a sample of fifteen women from five different countries, between the ages of 20 and 55 and sent out the necessary Ethics consent forms and information sheets. After I had received the signed consents, I made an introductory phone call to the women who live in Australia and contacted those who lived overseas by email in order to explain this study and get to know them a bit better and although no two stories were exactly the same, I was amazed at the similarities in the women’s experiences. The experiences and stories of the women who were chosen as participants form a vital part of this research and therefore the questions that I asked were carefully worded in order to avoid superficial answers. In his article, ‘Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research’, Donald Polkinghorne (2005) explains that ‘…the data gathered for the study of experience need to consist of first person or self reports of participants’ own experience’ (p. 138). As a result, my questions were designed to create the opportunity for participants to tell their own stories in their own words. It must be noted however that while these stories are valuable accounts of experiences, they are not totalisations of them. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) believe that

‘any gaze is always filtered through the lens of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity…Subjects or individuals are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why’ (p. 12).
In order to navigate the depths of the participants’ experiences I also analysed their answers by identifying the metaphors and emotive language that they use in order to gain a better understanding of not only a woman’s relationship with a gay man, but also the characteristics that distinguish the fag hag from other women. In *Metaphors we live by* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) suggest that we experience our world through metaphor and that ‘since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like’ (p. 103-104).

The responses I received from the women in this study were therefore analysed for metaphors that can account for their experiences and feelings. The emotions expressed in each interview were investigated in terms of Silvin Tomkins’ and Donald Nathanson’s theory of affect and in particular the affect of shame. Many of the women in this study exhibit the desire to withdraw from sexual relationships and it will be shown that they do this by forming a relationship with a gay man. It would seem these women suffer from the affect of shame that results from betrayal and exposure of a self that is made to feel defective. Shame makes us want to hide from the gaze of the other and when we wish we could crawl into bed and hide under the blankets we are responding to shame affect. In this research, I am particularly interested in shame not only because it plays an important part in what we know about ourselves and those we care about but also because shame decreases our interest or enjoyment in social interactions and so it can also be used to analyze social identification.

Nearly all of the women who agreed to assist in this research had joined the Mardi Gras float or had responded to my request for volunteers on the Oz Fag Hag website, so in most cases the interviews I conducted were either face to face or by telephone. However, a few replies came from women who lived outside Australia and in these instances I contacted the respondents and conducted interviews via email. The women’s stories have been transcribed and attached to this paper as Appendices, but out of respect for their privacy, I have changed names and eliminated some demographic and personal information that might identify them. During these interviews and also in conversations with some of the women who had joined the float for the Mardi Gras parade, I uncovered an important general misconception about the
fag hag identity. While many believe that this identity is about straight women and gay men, my investigations show that this is not necessarily the case. Although some of the respondents in this research identified as straight women who had only ever engaged in a sexual relationship with a man, others admitted to having had relationships with both men and women and in a few cases women had identified exclusively as lesbians. Therefore, I do not refer to the fag hag identity as exclusive to straight women but rather as an identity that can be adopted by any woman which shows that the fag hag identity is not based on sexual preference but rather her relationship with gay men.

This research also includes my own experience of being a fag hag. When I first began to write, I tried to silence myself, but I found that my years of living as a fag hag prevented this. I found my voice growing stronger as my writing progressed and I learned more about myself and the world that I had been a part of and, in many ways, still belong to. I started reading more about qualitative research and this path introduced me to a genre of writing that I felt would be the best way to present this investigation, that of auto ethnography. While Denzin and Lincoln’s (1998, 2005) framework situated my research as qualitative, I felt the need to adopt a more personal yet still authoritative approach in order to tell my story. My experiences as a fag hag had created a burning desire to write a narrative that would show the significance of this identity and accordingly I sought a methodology that would allow me to write emotively by including my voice. According to Carolyn Ellis, author of *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about teaching and doing auto ethnography*, ‘auto ethnography is…research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self consciousness, and introspection’ (2004, p. xix).

In the course of my investigation of available literature on auto ethnography it became clear that this form of methodology was ideal for writing about the fag hag because, like the fag hag, the auto ethnographer also transgresses boundaries. However, while the fag hag might cross boundaries that separate gay and straight culture, those who write auto ethnography navigate between the personal and the cultural. In her book, *Auto/Ethnography. Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Reed-Danahay puts forward the idea that ‘the auto ethnographer is a boundary-crosser and the role can be
characterized as that of a dual identity’ (1997, p. 3). After reading about auto ethnography I began to see clearly that this methodology was exactly what I needed for my project because it offered me a way to become a legitimate subject of my own research. Auto ethnography is a qualitative method that evolved in the postmodernist era and combines autobiography and ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997) and, when accompanied by more traditional qualitative methods such as interviews and an analysis of theoretical and cultural texts, my story will add another layer to this research. As well as the interviews with other fag hags and my own experience, it was also necessary for me to carry out some research of existing, albeit limited, literature on the fag hag identity.

The Literature
At present there are a limited number of studies that provide insight into the fag hag identity, and much of what has been written is from a gay male perspective and not from the position of the fag hag herself. While these texts are informative, they do not portray the fag hag identity from an experiential point of view but rather only tend to discuss the relationship as a coalition between a gay man and a woman. For example, Stephen Maddison (2000) investigates the cultural importance of the relationship between gay men and women using existing queer and feminist work from the perspective of a gay man. In his book *Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters*, Maddison, describes the fag hag as a ‘strident, emotionally resilient, privileged, tenacious and plucky’ (p. 9) female who aligns herself with gay culture and in doing so ‘engages in an act of gender dissent’ (p. 10). Maddison’s research suggests the need for further investigation into what he describes as the ‘enormous sub cultural investments gay men make with women, that is, with identification and thus with gender’ (pp. 84-85).

The relationship between gay men and women, for Maddison, can be regarded as heterosocial bonding which ‘resists the phallic unification of sexual indifference’ (p. 72). In other words, the bond between a gay man and a woman is contrary to the accepted same-sex bonds of male/male or female/female that are normally accepted forms of social friendships and it is also contrary to heterosexuality. Heterosocial bonding between gay men and women can also be regarded as ‘queer sistership… [which]… resists male homosocial subjectivity’ (p.12). In referring to the bond
between a gay man and a woman as a ‘queer sistership’ Maddison also implies a familial relationship that many of the women in this study also discuss. As this research will show, the bond that exists between a woman and a gay man is more than friendship. Firstly, it borders on a familial relationship, in particular that between sister and brother and secondly, it also raises important questions about female sexual identities and subjectivity.

While Maddison (2000) argues that the fag hag relationship offers the possibility to break new ground in bonds that unsettle existing patriarchal political alliances, in his article, ‘Sissies, Leeches and Sidekicks: Fags and Hags in the ‘60’s and the 90’s’, James Allan (2009) talks about the ways that the fag hag identity has been portrayed in film and television shows. Allan laments,

unfortunately, our popular culture thus far has been much more likely to produce sidekick stories or tales of sexual competition than stories of gender dissent and political affiliation. Moreover, the fact that these stories are based on a dramatically limited notion of femininity and gay male gender identity prevents them from being as transformative as they might be’ (p. 1).

Allan believes that even though the effeminate gay man has been represented in the media for many years, the fag hag has been less visible. He cites movies such as Andy Warhol’s 1959 movie My Hustler and the 1990’s classic My Best Friend’s Wedding as examples of the way that the fag hag identity has been portrayed in the past 50 years. Allan’s review of both movies shows how the portrayal of the relationship between gay men and women has improved over the past fifty or so years. In ‘My Hustler’ by Andy Warhol (1965) the term ‘fag’ and ‘fag hag’ are constantly used to describe the characters. While the main character, Ed, refers to himself and other gay men in the movie as fags and faggots he also describes his neighbor, Genevieve, as a fag hag. In this movie, women were characterized as leeches who tried to convert their gay male friends to heterosexuality and in one scene two gay men sit on the beach commentating as a young woman and man play in the surf. ‘Look at her!’ Ed exclaims with disgust. ‘These fag hags are all leeches. Look at her – she’s flirting with him! Ugh!’ (p. 3). In the movie My Best Friend’s Wedding, Julia Roberts plays the part of a woman who tries desperately to stop her
best male friend, played by Dermot Mulroney, from marrying another woman. In an attempt to make him jealous, Roberts convinces her gay friend to act the part of her new love so that Mulroney will realize his love for her and cancel the wedding. Although this movie shows some improvement in the image of the fag hag it still portrays the female fag hag as desperately pursuing a heterosexual relationship but, as will be shown in this study, this is not usually the case.

Dawne Moon (1995) is another theorist who discusses the fag hag identity but most of her work is conducted through interviews with gay men who give their views on the bonds they have with women. In her article ‘Insult and Inclusion: The Term Fag Hag and Gay Male Community’, Moon looks at the relationship between gay men and straight women by talking exclusively with gay men. However, Moon does not interview the women who identify with these men nor does she make any reference to her own lived experience, therefore her work is more appropriate for those studying this relationship from the point of view of gay men. Many of the men interviewed in this article refer to fag hags as desperate, loud mouthed women who try to seduce gay men. For example, when Moon asks one respondent his opinion on what a fag hag is, he replies ‘…it’s a derogatory statement, in my experience, anyway. It means a masculine bitch, with a very big mouth, who will flaunt her relationships in public by acting like ‘one of the guys,’ making’ cock-sucking’ remarks or whatever—pardon the expression…’ (p. 488). Throughout the text, fag hags are perceived to be straight women, and as Moon states in her concluding notes, her research excludes ‘lesbians, bisexuals and people and groups of many other identities’ (p. 508). But Moon puts forward a thought provoking challenge to those who follow her by stating that the term fag hag ‘resides at the nexus of discourses of sexuality and gender’ (p. 487) and it is from this position that she can expose the tensions that exist in dominant discourses within gay male culture.

On the other hand, Deborah Thompson (2004) examines identity politics from the perspective of the fag hag and believes, ‘the lack of public discourse on the fag hag and on fag-fag hag relations signals a lack of discussion on related issues of cross-identification and political alliances’ (p. 40). In an auto ethnographical account of her own identification with gay men, Thompson proposes that the fag hag can help to solve some important questions about identification but until recently the relationship
she has with gay men has been a ‘love that dare not speak its name’ (p. 40). Some of
the questions that Thompson asks are centered on the nature of the fag-fag hag
relationship and the fear that this bond creates within identity politics, even now ‘…in
an era of identity politics that encourages so many identity categories to declare pride
and respect’ (p. 40). It is my intention, throughout this study, to provide some
answers that might initiate serious discussion about the fag hag identity that will
dissipate those fears and show that the fag hag is a valuable member of the queer
community. Thompson also relates stories of her own bond with gay men and gives
an account of her early fag hag experiences in an effort to ‘illustrate[s], among other
things, both the stigma and the lack of language to describe fag-fag hag relations’ (p.
39-40).

During the course of this research it has become increasingly clear, in not only my
own experience but also that of the other women in this study that many women
identify with gay men long before they have the language to describe the relationship.
In her book, *Guilty pleasures: Feminist camp from Madonna to Mae West*, Pamela
Robertson (1996), also comments on the lack of language surrounding the concept of
the fag hag saying;

> the fact that we don’t talk about friendships between gay men and women
reflects…the larger academic divisions that obtain between gay and
feminist theory, as well as lesbian and gay, and heterosexual and lesbian
feminist, theory. Academic politics and identity politics are such that
instead of seeking points of overlap between gay men and women and
between lesbian and heterosexual women, we increasingly focus on
differences, (p. 40).

But, the fag hag defies this belief because she crosses the borders between straight
and gay cultures. In her article, ‘The liminal rhetorical space of the fag hag: Bridging
rhetoric and queer theory within Sex and the City’, Cara Buckley describes the
transgressive nature of the fag hag as a ‘unique and troubling existence’ (2009, p. 1).
Buckley suggests that the fag hag’s ability to cross borders of sexual definition creates
uncertainty and destabilization around the subject of identification and because of this
‘the cultural significance of the fag hag lies in its ties to the stance of ‘I don’t know’.
The fag hag…dwells in the space of uncertainty… [and]… as both an identity and a relationship exists in liminality’ (p. 3). As discussed earlier, liminality can be thought of as the space between things, and so the concept of liminality can be used to refer to that space between gay and straight cultures that the fag hag resides in and because of this position she destabilizes existing notions of sexual identity. As a liminal identity, the fag hag might be regarded as a type of transitional figure who functions as a reminder that we do not belong to just one culture but that ‘we contain a multiplicity of voices and selves, some of which may even be contradictory. And [she] tells us that there is nothing wrong with contradiction’ (p.6).

While Buckley (2009) might extol the virtue of contradiction and uncertainty it remains evident that today’s society still clings to a desire to preserve what is clearly defined. Liminal spaces act to corrupt existing categories and according to Buckley, ‘once a category is sullied, its claim to certainty of identification is forever lost’ (p. 1). This suggests that the fag hag unsettles existing notions of sexual identification and exposes the flaws within them which give rise to societal fears about the destabilisation of current ideas of identity. Another theorist who acknowledges the fag hag’s relation to liminality is Eve Sedgwick. In her book *The epistemology of the closet* Sedgwick (1990), reveals her own experience of the fag hag identity which she refers to as:

…something, that is, whose names where they exist at all are still so exotically coarse and demeaning as to challenge recognition, never mind acknowledgement; leaving, in the stigma-impregnated space of refused recognition, sometimes also a stimulating ether of the unnamed, the lived experiment (p. 63).

Here, I believe that Sedgwick is referring to the fag hag as abject which Julia Kristeva (1982) explains as that which is neither subject nor object and situated somewhere in the space before entry into the symbolic order. Kristeva explains the abject as that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules’ (p. 4). From her liminal position between the borders of sexual identification the fag hag not only questions existing notions of gender relations, she also has the power to create understanding between gay and straight cultures. However, while
some theorists posit the fag hag identity only in terms of her alignment with gay men as a type of political dissent, I believe that there is much more to be learned from those women who become very much a part of a gay community. These women are there not only because they do not conform to patriarchal expectations but the gay community that accepts them becomes an integral part of their search for subjectivity.

According to my research, a woman whose primary relationship is with a gay man finds not only a bond of alliance against patriarchal expectation, but also a space where she is able to overcome some type of trauma that relates to matters of sexuality. As I believe that this desire to escape from heteronormative society can be understood by using affect theory, I will use Silvin Tomkins’ and Donald Nathanson’s work on affect as a basis for analysis of the interviews conducted. Research carried out by Silvin Tomkins’ (1962, 1963, 1991) and published in his three volume work, Affect/Imagery/Consciousness provides a clear idea of the way that affect influences our social interaction. Tomkins describes emotion as the most important motivator of human behavior but explains that before we experience an emotion there are a number of physiological changes that occur both on and in the body which he described as affects. Accordingly he identified nine innate affects which are categorized as either positive or negative.

The positive affects are interest/excitement and enjoyment/joy while the negative affects are: fear/terror; anger/rage; distress/anguish; disgust, dissmell and shame - the only neutral affect being surprise/startle. Tomkins ordered each affect according to its scale of intensity, for example, in the affect interest/excitement, interest is the lesser and excitement the more intense experience. Each affect is accompanied by specific actions that appear on the face as well as the body, so for example when fear overcomes us, our eyes remain fixed to the object of fear, our skin pales and our body feels cold and sweaty as it prepares to either fight or escape. My research shows that, the fag hag and unruly woman often tend to experience affect at the most intense end of the scale and I will investigate the ways that this might be related to an earlier traumatic event that could result in the amplified experience of all future affect.

After Tomkins’ death, Donald Nathanson (1992) continued work in affect dealing specifically with shame and pride in his book “Shame and Pride – Affect, Sex and the
According to Nathanson (1992), affect is directly related to our experiences of the world and how we react to them. Nathanson argues that the image we have of ourselves is directly related to others opinions of us, so our self-image includes values regarding matters of strength, weakness and competency, or affectivity. This means that we can not be objective in our self evaluation – we tend to think of our self in either a positive or negative way and therefore shame and pride assume an important role in our lives (Nathanson, 1992). Nathanson explains that pride is born in competency and accomplishment and a sense of connection with others, whereas shame is based in a defective sense of self that isolates us from others. Shame is painful and at times unbearable, but no matter how we experience it, we will go to great lengths in order to alleviate its discomfort.

Shame demands that we take some kind of action: we can withdraw from the situation, we can avoid the cause of our shame, and we can attack ourselves or attack others emotionally, verbally or physically. Our reactions are triggered by something that reminds us, either consciously or subconsciously, of a similar, past event and these four responses or strategies that we use are referred to as the “compass of shame” (Nathanson, 1992:312). This means that, when we experience shame we will subconsciously choose a response that is based on our own previous experiences. Nathanson points out that, while we use all four strategies of the compass of shame, we tend to favor one and the development of this reactive phase of shame is “essential to the birth of the self” (p. 313). In terms of our relationships with others, shame would then be regarded as an affect that returns us to our state of “primary isolation” (Nathanson, 1992, p. 234), which, for some women in this research means revisiting the pre-oedipal, symbiotic relationship with mother which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Models and Representations

This research will combine theories regarding early maternal and paternal relationships as well as the sibling relationship between a brother and sister. As a basis for my investigation of a woman’s early family relationships, I studied Sigmund Freud’s famous case study of ‘Dora’. Freud based an important part of his work on the Oedipal myth which he used as a model for family relationships and (hetero)
sexuality and is useful as a starting point for discussion and analysis of the familial relations of the fag hag. In his essay, ‘A case of hysteria: The clinical picture’, as translated by James Strachey, Freud explains that, ‘the legend of Oedipus is probably to be regarded as a poetical rendering of what is typical in these [family] relations’ (Freud, 2001/1953, p. 56). During the course of this research, it became clear that not all family relationships can be explained using Freud’s ideas on the oedipal family but, instead, other myths seem to provide better models for the study of familial bonds. In their book, Classical mythology: Images and insights, Harris and Platzner believe that the gods of Greek myth exhibit character traits and personalities that act as ‘guidelines for classes and categories of the human’ (2004, p. 45). Carl Jung, an early follower of Freud, called these classes and categories archetypes referring to myths as projections of society’s collective unconscious (Jung, 1969). For example, modern fag hags display some of the unruly characteristics of the goddesses and heroines of Greek mythology such as Athene, Artemis, Electra and Antigone who were courageous, outspoken and defiant of the ruling patriarchal order.

After meeting some of the women who had agreed to participate in this study, I found they all shared common characteristics not only because they identified with gay men but also because they were outspoken, independent and sure of themselves in what might be considered to be an unruly performance of gender. These women demonstrate that, in most cases, fag hags are loud and opinionated, preferring an ambiguous gender which results in a blending together of many attributes and characteristics that can also be found in representations of women in Greek mythology. In his book, The god of ecstasy: Sex roles and the madness of Dionysios, Arthur Evans explains that mythology is a rich resource for research into the history of sexuality and gender because its stories ‘remind us that human beings once had alternative value systems [and] can provide a basis for criticism of contemporary patriarchal society and also assist in the planning of social reconstruction’ (1988, p. 176). According to myth, Electra united with her brother in an act of conspiracy against their mother and while Athene identified with men, Artemis is often shown alongside her brother, Apollo, in existing art and sculpture, (Harris and Platzner, 2004). Athene and Artemis have much in common: both are considered to be sworn to virginity, have no sexual relationships and are self sufficient and independent.
Some of these characteristics can be found in some fag hags. According to Harris and Platzner (2004), ‘Artemis has powers that threaten male hegemony, and she is portrayed as terrifying, even deadly, to men who find themselves drawn to her physical allure’ (p. 196). In Sophocles’ play Antigone the heroine’s bond with her brother Polynieces is so strong that she risks her life in order to give him a proper burial (Harris and Platzner, 2004). What these myths illustrate is a strong bond of loyalty that exists between women and their brothers and the risks that the women are willing to undertake for them.

In this way, stories that relate to the myths of Athene, Artemis, Electra and Antigone can be used as models to examine aspects of family relationships that can not be studied by using Freud’s oedipal theory. In other words, Freud’s oedipal theories may work for some family romances but not in the case of the fag hag. After an investigation of Freud’s analysis of ‘Dora’ it became clear that there were some relationships that might have been important to the young girl’s case study but these were not fully investigated. When Freud welcomed the young 18 year old Dora into his office, it has been argued that he saw her case as a way of proving his own theories on hysteria and the interpretation of dreams and accordingly, he manipulated the young girl’s confessions about her life so that they would fit his theories (Appignanesi and Forrester, 1992). As a result, the case of Dora might not have achieved a successful ‘cure’ for the young girl, but in the field of psychoanalysis it opened the door for subsequent debate that led to more advanced psychoanalytical theories.

Freud failed to find a ‘cure’ for Dora because she did not fit his oedipal theories, but he also failed because he did not pay closer attention to her relationship with her mother. It appears that Dora’s silence around the relationship that she had with her mother is not unique. I spent many months researching the importance of the mother/daughter relationship and many more trying to illicit information about it from the women in this research. When it comes to family relationships, it seems to me that the bond that women find hardest to talk about is the one that they share with their mothers, and I believe that this could be a sign of what Noelle McAfee (2004) refers to in her book on Julia Kristeva as ‘narcissistic depression’ (p. 60). This
research investigates the impact of the mother-daughter relationship on the bonds that women form throughout life by referring to theories offered by writers such as Jane Flax (1978), Nancy Chodorow (1994), Julia Kristeva (1982) and Marianne Hirsch (1981). Jane Flax’s (1978) research is based on the period of symbiosis and, while Julia Kristeva (1982) discusses the symbiotic relationship with the mother she also introduces her theory of the abject. Kristeva explains that prior to our entrance into symbolic language there is a developmental moment of abjection in which an infant differentiates from mother and realises that symbiosis no longer exists. According to Kristeva the abject ‘marks our separation from the mother, the moment when we began to recognize a boundary between ‘me’ and other, between ‘me’ and ‘(m)other’ (p. 12) Any subsequent references to abjection, or to an abject state of being, take us back to this initial moment of abject division and loss. We replay these developmental stages at particular moments which involve loss, joy, sadness, love, emptiness or depression and these abject encounters are accompanied by the feeling of loss and gain and are linked to affect.

Marianne Hirsch’s (1981) article Mothers and Daughters reviews theories of the relationship between mothers and daughters. Hirsch suggests that the Pre-Oedipal bond between a mother and daughter has a significant impact on a girl’s sense of self as well as the relationships that she forms with others later in her development. It appears that any rupture in this relationship as a result of the mother’s absence, either physical or emotional can lead to problems related to female subjectivity. It will be shown that the women interviewed as part of this research, have experienced some degree of abandonment, either physical or emotional, by their mother and that shame plays an important role in their subsequent relationships. The early bond between mother and daughter ruptures due to the lack of affective communication between them and in turn this results in form of depression or shame.

I will continue the investigation into familial relationships by looking firstly at the figure of the father and progressing to the sibling relationship of sister and brother. After an investigation of the mother-daughter relationship, I began to research the relationship between a father and daughter in order to better understand the family dynamics that operated around the fag hag identity. But a search of available literature on the father-daughter relationship seems to ultimately result in reference to
Freud’s oedipal complex which relies on the centrality of the father. Again, the story of Dora provides us with an insight into the ways that patriarchal thought judges women as objects of masculine desire, and even though Freud suggested a feminine Oedipus complex as a theoretical counterpart to his existing oedipal theory this still involves the father as a central figure. According to this theory, the girl’s move away from her mother leads her to transfer her affections to her father but this transfer causes her to hate her mother whom she sees as a rival (Appignanesi, 1992).

In Freud’s family romance, while mother might have been unavailable, there is always a chance for the young girl to recover from her wound through identification with her father who will show her that she is loved and valued. But, fathers can also be absent from the young girl’s early life story and if this is the case, she is denied a second chance at self validation. I propose that if the girl can not identify with her father because of his absence, she might fill the void by identifying with a brother or another close platonic male who can give her the self validation that she seeks. Many of the women in this research recount stories of their youth as being spent with brothers, male cousins or neighbourhood boys and they subsequently report that, until they reached puberty, these bonds were close. While there is an absence of research on the relationship between brothers and sisters, those studies available suggest that this relationship is much closer to that of a woman and a gay man than are explained using Oedipal theories. Research conducted by Jessica Benjamin (1998), Prophecy Coles (2006) and Jennifer Silverstone (2006) acknowledges the importance of a bond where a girl identifies with her brother, either real or based in phantasy. All the women in this study confirm that they regard their relationship with gay men as more than a friendship and declare that they feel a strong kinship type of bond with these men.

Although there is a lack of current information regarding the sister brother relationship there are many examples of this type of bond to be found in ancient myth. During the course of this research I noticed that some of the women (and I include myself here) occasionally refer to their gay male friends as ‘boys’. It seems to me that in referring to gay men as boys, these women are de-sexualizing them because they see their bond with gay men in the same way as those early platonic ties to young boys. It seems that once the boys reached maturity, their desire moved from platonic
to sexual and so while brothers and cousins ventured into the world in search of sexual conquest the other boys thought that they had to look no further than their own neighbourhood. Girls can become very vulnerable to shame in adolescence and in general they are mostly anxious about physical attractiveness and failure in interpersonal relationships, and it is in situations when issues of sexuality are raised, that women might report trauma.

There has been one constant cause of traumatic experience amongst the women who participated in this research and that is the shame that is attached to their stories about their experiences in sexual relationships. Shame is associated with matters of visibility, sexuality, and also with matters regarding social interaction so the events where it will be most likely to arise in an adult woman will be in her intimate relationships with others (Nathanson, 1992). Mostly, these intimate relationships are sexual and some of these cases are based on heteronormativity. However, in some cases, women experience shame in their sexual relationships with other women and this is one reason why the bond between gay men and women can not be described in terms of heterosexuality. For those women who have experienced pre-oedipal loss, simmering shame erupts more violently than is normally expected and this could mean that when a sexual relationship ends the woman who is carrying a narcissistic wound is more likely to experience an intense reaction. One of the effects of shame is the desire to temporarily escape from the eyes of the other, and gay men represent safety from sexual judgment because they are more interested in wearing your pants than getting into them. Gay men also help to heal this narcissistic wound by offering an alternative path for acquiring that initial empathic communication that a woman might not have received from mother or alternatively her father or lover.

The myth of Dionysios is particularly important to this research because, of all the Greek myths, this story is the one that is most closely associated with the experience of the party and celebratory lifestyle of a particular gay community. This gay community is one that is based on a culture of pleasure and pain in a similar way to Dionysian religion and therefore, Dionysian beliefs can provide a basis for theoretical discussion and areas of enquiry based on the culture of the gay nightclub. It would appear that, for the fag hag, the gay nightclub becomes a place representative of the imaginary father and as such, it functions as a means of identification and because
identification precedes identity, the nightclub becomes an important concept in the fag hag’s acquisition of subjectivity. Gay men, and by extension the gay community, operate at the level of empathic connection and so through her relationship with a gay man a woman may learn to connect with her own empathic response. So, you might say that the gay man introduces a woman to a new language, one that will help her to identify her loss and move into a subjective position. The dialogue between a gay man and a woman does not involve sexuality and so the fag hag is free to experiment with her own versions of gender performance. Therefore, it could be considered that, for the adult woman, the gay man and his community is able to alleviate, to some extent, the longing for that original Thing which was lost.

As an adult, the woman is subjected to patriarchal expectations which demand her conformity and compliance and those women who do not perform an acceptable gender script are considered to be unruly. For the woman who has identified with boys, this proves a hard task because her performance of femininity has been influenced by youthful masculinity. As will be discussed in a later chapter, one of the characteristics of identification is the incorporation of the Other’s ways of being. For the young girl who identifies with boys, this can be seen in the way that she adopts the boy’s performance of gender. Therefore the young girl will adopt the mannerisms and behaviors of those boys that she identifies with and it is these characteristics that render her an unruly woman in her adult life. So, instead of conforming to patriarchal notions of femininity which demand that she be submissive, lacking and powerless, the young girl is loud, opinionated and independent preferring an ambiguous gender performance. In adulthood, these characteristics threaten patriarchal norms because they unsettle power relations and destabilize normative social structures. In most cases, a woman will eventually reconnect with patriarchal performances of masculinity but in a different way to that initial connection that had brought about shame.

During the course of this research, many of the women I interviewed complained that they found the term ‘fag hag’ offensive and expressed the desire for a new name but I have resisted this request for many reasons. While I believe that the term ‘queer sister’ that is used by many theorists has the potential to accurately describe the familial bonds that might exist between a woman and a gay man, I am still of the
opinion that the name ‘fag hag’ is a more fitting description of this relationship. The phrase ‘fag hag’ suggests a woman’s inclusion in a gay community by the joining of two abject words that create the image of an alliance between two groups of people who are considered abject. The gay man, or fag as he is sometimes referred to, is abject because he disturbs the notions of heteronormative performances of masculinity whereas the fag hag troubles notions of acceptable feminine performance. Secondly, the word hag brings to mind images of witches or crones who were regarded as women who transgressed boundaries and in doing so threatened the societies in which they lived in much the same way as the modern fag hag.

It is because of her ability to transgress boundaries, her rebellion against patriarchy and her links with abjection, that the term fag hag is the most appropriate for those women who have strong bonds with gay men. There are many other names that have been attached to the woman who aligns herself with gay men and some are considered by many to be more flattering than others. Many of the women in this research do not like the term fag hag because they feel that it invokes images of an old, ugly woman and instead, they prefer less offensive terms such as ‘fruit fly’, ‘flame dame’, ‘handbag’ and ‘beard’. But while some women feel that the term is insulting and derogatory, there are many who embrace it and feel that it is the most appropriate term because it is as transgressive as the fag hag herself. Comedienne Margaret Cho (2001) defends fag hag as a name and says that she wears the title proudly because in her opinion, even though the terms ‘faggot’ and ‘hag’ are derogatory, when used together they seem to cancel each other out. I believe that the negative connotations associated with the term fag hag are put in place by a patriarchal society that might feel threatened by a woman who refuses to conform to its expectations of gender performance, in much the same way as the medieval witches from whom she takes her name.

According to Douglas Harper’s (2001) Online etymology dictionary, the term ‘fag hag’ is the joining of two transgressive words that produce images of an outsider or fringe dweller. Today, the word faggot is an offensive term used to refer to homosexual men. But the word ‘faggot’ was first recorded in 1300 AD and referred to ‘a bundle of sticks, twigs, or small branches of trees bound together: for use as fuel for the burning of heretics’ (np). In 1225 AD the word hag first appeared as a
contraction of the Germanic ‘haegesse, [meaning] witch or fury [and was] connected to the Olde English term haga meaning enclosure or hedge’ (np) while the term ‘Hagazussa refers to a fence rider – one who resides between the world of humans and the world of spirits’ (np.). In medieval times, hags or witches were usually portrayed as women who were connected with evil and mystery and lived a seemingly androgynous lifestyle on the outskirts of the town, while faggotts were the bundles of sticks that were tied together and used to fuel the fires for the witches’ executions. These medieval women refused to conform to a socially prescribed script of femininity by living outside normal patriarchal expectations of what a woman should be and as a result they were punished for their rebellion. In this respect, the term fag hag would seem to be the most appropriate for an identity that threatens heteronormative values by residing on the boundaries of gay and straight culture, thereby unsettling acceptable gender expectations.

While the women in this research might not agree on an appropriate terminology for those who identify with gay men, they are all in agreement about the positive aspects that they experience in their relationships with gay men and their community. This research has provided some thought provoking ideas about not only the fag hag identity and its origins, but also about the function of the fag hag identity for not only the woman who identifies with gay men, but also for the community that allows her access to it. It is hoped that the ideas and suggestions that arise in this thesis will pave the way for more research into the relationship that women and gay men share, because it provides valuable and fertile ground for not only academic discussion but also cultural understanding.

**The Chapters**

According to my research, a woman’s potential identification with gay men begins long before she knows what a fag hag, or even a gay man, is. It begins in the early days of life before she has found her loud voice. While theories pertaining to identity and gender relations were useful to some extent, it was also necessary to enter into discussions that relate to early experience and family relations in order to understand why a woman would want to escape heteronormativity and hide in a gay community. In this respect, I will investigate the family relationships of the women in this study as a way of finding some of the reasons that might lead a woman to identify with gay
men. In the next chapter I will discuss the family relationships of the fag hag beginning with the most important one of all, the relationship between a mother and daughter. This chapter will use information from interviews; my own experience and models from Greek mythology as well as biographical information of women who identify with gay men in order to investigate not only the mother and daughter bond but also that between a father and daughter and this will be followed by an investigation of the brother sister relationship. While it is not my intention to lay any blame on parents, it seems to be that if a mother and/or father are absent during important developmental periods of a young girl’s life she may experience problems associated with identity and subjectivity.

Chapter Three will discuss the fag hag’s inclusions in a gay community that will eventually result in her acquiring a different subjectivity. It would seem that the gay man and his community offer a safe refuge and period of respite for women who have been subjected to sexual trauma, either as children or later on in their intimate adult relationships. It seems to be that a woman who has identified with boys in her early years might seek that same safe and loving relationship after traumatic encounters with sexuality. Gay men and the community that accept women into its domain allow those women to find their own subjectivity by providing a safe space of play for experimenting with versions of selfhood. It seems to be that a girl might turn to a brother or similar male platonic relationship in order to find the validation she did not get in her earlier familial relationships with mother and father. It will be shown that the potential for becoming a fag hag is one that originates in the period of abjection which is the period preceding the acquisition of language and this becomes an important link to later traumatic experiences caused by dominant discourses of masculinity. These instances of trauma cause narcissistic depressions to re surface bringing about shame and the need to withdraw from the heteronormative gaze. In this period of withdrawal, the fag hag begins to see herself through the mirror of the gay man and it is in this reflection that she is able to turn shame into pride and abject into subject.
CHAPTER TWO – FAMILY DYNAMICS OF THE FAG HAG

Sibling relationships ... outlast marriages,
survive the death of parents,
resurface after quarrels that would sink any friendship.
They flourish in a thousand incarnations of closeness and distance,
warmth, loyalty and distrust.

Erica E. Goode

In the previous Chapter, I introduced the idea that the potential for becoming a fag hag originates in early infancy and is based in family relations. After an analysis of the interviews conducted with the women participating in this research I noticed some common attributes that seem to weave their way through many of their answers. Amongst these common underlying problems are the absences of mother and/or father during early infancy; an inability or unwillingness to talk about their relationship with mother; underlying depression and difficulty in maintaining adult relationships. This chapter will argue that a parent’s absence or emotional unavailability during the early stage of an infant’s development is important to the genesis of the fag hag identity. It seems that the fag hag gets stuck somewhere in the transition between the pre-oedipal and the oedipal period and I propose that this transitional phase is the period of abjection when the infant is neither subject nor object. For a young girl, this means she will experience melancholic depression which will affect adult relationships and one way that the fag hag eventually finds her way out of this abject space is through identification with a gay man.

Rethinking Oedipus

Early familial relationships are our first experiences of interpersonal communication and as our very first relationship is with our mother it is a bond that will have a very important effect on the way that we connect with others later in life. It is through our family connections that we learn who we are, how to love and how to stand alone. One way of looking at the family dynamics of the fag hag is by studying the archetypal relationships that are to be found in Greek mythology as an alternative to Freud’s oedipal complex. I will use other myths as models for the fag hag because classical oedipal theories only make reference to the relationship between the child
and its parents as a way of achieving heterosexuality and the fag hag does not fit these theories. I propose that that the fag hag and her gay male friend form a coalition that might be described in terms of a type of sibling bond that is similar to that of Electra and Orestes and this type of surrogate relationship becomes apparent in most of the case studies I have undertaken. It is important to note that while some of the women in this study did have brothers, this is not always the case and it is also possible that this role can be fulfilled by either a close family relative such as an uncle or cousin or alternatively it can be a platonic friendship with boys. Therefore, although I use the term brother in this discussion and analysis, I also mean any significant male platonic relationship that existed before puberty. In the following pages, my aim is to look at family relationships and their impact on the fag hag identity beginning with the most controversial of all – that of the bond between a mother and daughter which begins in, what Freud identified as the pre-oedipal period of infancy. Freud (1931) believed that the pre-Oedipal phase in girls and boys was essentially the same, and that the girl did not recognize her femininity until the Oedipal phase, when she was forced to accept that she did not have a penis. Once she realised that she was, in fact, ‘castrated’ she could then begin to identify with her mother whom she saw as equally defective. But despite similarities between boys and girls in the pre oedipal period, Freud acknowledged that the girl’s relationship with the pre-Oedipal mother was much more intense, conflicted, and ambivalent than that of the boy.

While Freud did not pay much attention to this bond with mother in his analysis of female patients such as Ida Brauer and Anna ‘O’, today researchers and feminist theorists such as Adrienne Rich (1976), Marianne Hirsch (1981), Jane Flax (1978) and Nancy Chodorow (1971, 1978) extend Freud’s work and acknowledge the importance of the early mother/daughter relationship. Some of these theorists base their research in early pre-Oedipal relationships with the mother in order to understand development and developmental problems in young girls, but I propose that these problems can not always be solved by using oedipal theories. In contrast to Freud, Julia Kristeva emphasizes the importance of the mother and her role in the development of subjectivity and access to culture and language. For Kristeva, a child must successfully navigate the period of abjection that occurs between the realization that it is separate from mother and before the acquisition of language. Any absence of the mother within this abject period can result in what Kristeva refers to as
‘narcissistic depression’ and this will lead to problems that can appear later in life and it seems that this is, in some ways, similar to Heinz Kohut’s (1968, 1971, 1972) notion of ‘self objects’ and their implications in ‘narcissistic disturbances’.

In his work on ‘self object’ theories, Heinz Kohut moved away from Freud’s oedipal theories and placed more emphasis on the role of both parents in the dynamics of the self. Kohut proposed that the failure of both parents (whom he referred to as ‘self objects’) to act as responsive mirroring figures who can be idealized can lead to ‘narcissistic disturbances’ for the child. Kohut explains that failure of self objects can be linked to experiences of shame and in this study many of the responses to interview questions suggest underlying shame. Therefore Kohut’s theories can provide an alternate way of looking at the role that parents might play in a woman’s search for self and underlying shame. Accordingly, I will make use of Kohut’s ideas on self objects in my discussion of the interview responses in this study as a way of investigating problems relating to the absence or unavailability of both parents. In accordance with Kohut’s principals, rather than using Freud’s oedipal myth, I will use myths relating to other female Greek models such as Electra and Antigone in order to talk about family relationships and their significance to a girl’s subjective development. Antigone was the daughter of Oedipus and cared for her father until his death. Antigone’s loyalty to her dead brother was not only a form of family allegiance; it is also representative of the bond between a woman and a man who rebels against paternal authority and this can be seen in the way that both Antigone and her brother are exiled because of their rebellious behavior. Antigone’s brother, Polyneices, fought against his King in the war against Thebes and was regarded as a traitor. When he was killed in the war, his sister, Antigone defied the King’s decree that his body be left to rot in the field of battle. In an act of defiance, Antigone stole her brother’s body and gave him a proper burial which resulted in her own death and in this way, the myth of Antigone can be used as a model for the bond between a brother and sister.

The myth of Electra can be used as a way of looking at the ambivalence between mother and daughter that appears in many of the stories of fag hags in this research and she is also another example of the bond between brother and sister that can develop because of the father’s absence. Electra conspired with her brother, Orestes,
in a plot to kill their mother, Clytemnestra, as revenge for the murder of their father, Agamemnon, when he returned from the Trojan Wars. Electra is portrayed as being in a state of endless sorrow (mourning) for her dead father and overwhelming hatred for her mother and can be used as a model for not only the mother/daughter relationship but also the relationship between sister and brother. Electra’s hatred of her mother is the driving force behind her allegiance with Orestes and this hatred is believed to be the cause of her conflict of self and subsequent identification with her father and, after his death, her brother.

When Electra’s father sacrificed his youngest daughter to the gods, Clytemnestra was consumed with grief for her younger daughter yet did not show any love for Electra whom she dressed in the rags of slavery. In return, Electra did not feel her mother’s anguish but instead aligned herself with her father, effectively forgiving him for the murder of her sister. Electra’s lack of empathy for her mother turned to hate when she discovered her mother had murdered her father and, as a result, the young girl mourned for not only her father, but also for the indescribable feelings of loss that might have resulted from her mother’s abandonment much earlier in Electra’s infancy. According to Julia Kristeva (1989) the feelings of loss that the daughter experiences because of either the real or perceived absence of mother manifest as a type of narcissistic depression or melancholia. As a result of this symbiotic loss, which occurs in the first six months of life, the daughter will experience feelings of ambivalence towards her mother that may last a lifetime. This means that, while she loves her mother and can not do with out her, the girl will also develop unconscious feelings of anger towards her mother for abandoning her. Many of the fag hags in this research also show signs of ambivalence toward mother and identification with either their fathers, brothers or other significant platonic male figures. It can also be seen that, like Electra, these women also suffer from some form of maternal absence in early infancy.

**The Mother/Daughter relationship**

The women in this study commonly relate stories that suggest some form of unavailability of their mothers during early infancy. Although none of them were able to give a direct account of this period of development, like Electra, some of their stories reveal ambivalence and lack of empathy that might suggest the melancholia.
that results from their mother’s unavailability in early infancy. For example, while Sofia (Appendix) describes her relationship with her mother as one of ‘love/hate’ (p. 29), Dianna (Appendix) reveals that although she loved her mother, she thought of her as ‘not a very clever woman’ (p.15) and preferred the company of her father. Bonnie (Appendix) also exemplifies the ambivalence associated with a break down in the early maternal bond when she explains that her mother still treats her as a ‘toy to send expensive presents to and ignore till she feels like playing with me again’ (p.35). According to Nathanson (1992), ‘patterns of attachment appear soon after birth, and they remain remarkably stable over the course of life’ (p. 233) so it would seem that the ambivalence and lack of empathy that is evident in these stories could most likely have its origins in early infancy.

There are different ways a mother might be unavailable to her infant, from a short lapse between a child’s cry of hunger and the mother’s satisfaction of that need, to the total and complete abandonment of the child. Nathanson (1992) believes that ‘maternal attention can be demanded and received and still actually ineffective – we can feel ‘alone’ and unattended even when someone is there!’ (p. 249). Mother can be absent for many reasons – she might be out of the room, or suffering from depression, she might be ill or preoccupied with another member of the family who demands extra attention but nevertheless, these absences, either physical or emotional, can result in feelings of abandonment for the child. Dianna (Appendix) explains that her mother suffered a prolonged illness that required hospitalization and expresses overwhelming fears that she would never see her mother again. Soon after her recovery, Dianna says that her mother became an alcoholic and therefore the young girl might have perceived this addiction as yet another form of her mother’s abandonment. Abandonment is a catalyst for shame and it could be that the infant who experiences feelings of abandonment internalizes shame which may lead to attachment problems later in adult life.

A study carried out by Swedish psychologists, Katja Claesson and Staffan Sholberg (2002) concerning the link between early interactions in mother/child bonds and the internalized shame that results from abandonment found ‘that internalized shame tends to correlate with experiences of being met by indifference, abandonment and rejection’ (277). In this respect, Claesson and Sholberg maintain that a girl’s early
experiences with mother ‘are believed to have profound effects on emerging self-image’ (277). This could mean that infants who experience feelings of abandonment or isolation because of the mother’s absence, either emotional or physical, may suffer from later problems relating to the way that they see themselves and their relationships with others. In the case of the fag hag, this rupture in the early relationship with mother could lead to problems with emotional attachment to others in her adult relationships. It might be that some women who adopt the fag hag identity spend their lives trying to satisfactorily resolve this early bond but because mother was not available to help them do this initially, they find it an impossible task. As a result, the woman may find herself forming relationships that are unsatisfactory and resemble the incomplete maternal bond.

During the course of the interviews in this study, I found that some of the women also reported this search for acceptance that might result from feelings of abandonment in their early relationship with mother. Sofia’s (Appendix) father was an alcoholic and her mother spent most of her time dealing with his abuse both emotionally and physically. Sofia explains that because of her father’s violent behaviour she took over the role of mother and cared for her younger brother as well as her mother. As a result of her mother’s inability to provide acceptance Sofia only forms relationships with those people who rely on her in some way. Sofia admits that she must be the carer in any relationship that she has and feels that she always puts others first saying; most of my relationships only succeed if I am able to ‘look after’ and ‘mother’ my friends/boyfriends. I only feel useful in a relationship if I’m able to be the fixer. It also reflects my career choices, as the most successful roles I’ve had have been Personal Assistant or Office Manager where I’m the ‘go to’ person for the organization (p. 27).

It would seem that, as a child, Sofia became overly sensitive to her mother’s needs and accordingly she only seeks friendships with people who need her in the same way that her mother needed and relied on her. According to Flax (1978), in the period of symbiosis, which occurs during its first six months of life, the baby is ‘extremely sensitive to its mother’s moods and feelings. In this state of fusion with the mother I and not-I are not yet differentiated and inside and outside the self are only gradually distinguished’ (p. 173). This sharing of affect is the beginning of empathy, between
child and mother when the child becomes aware of, what Bernstein (2004) describes as a ‘bridge between her mind and the mind of the mother’ (p. 607). Nathanson (1994) explains that our first love relationship starts with the facial display of emotion that we received from our mother and, ‘it is the affects…that first link between infant and caregiver; attachment behaviors are all derivatives of affective expression’ (p. 231). Mothers initially communicate with their infants through affect as they respond to their baby’s facial expressions by either imitation or by being ‘available to the contagious quality of babies’ affect’ (p. 62). Consequently, as a mother focuses intently on her child she mirrors the same affect that it is experiencing at the time and in doing so the mother ‘has entered the internal system of the baby’ (p. 62). In the case of the fag hag, I propose that any failure of empathic connection in this symbiotic period might result in the daughter’s search for empathy in her adult life. In a patriarchal society, men are not encouraged to be empathic but instead are expected to hide their feelings and emotions. As a result, the women in this research explain that they are able to find this empathic connection in their relationship with a gay man.

As a young girl, I too felt that I was searching for something. I still remember my Year 11 Geography teacher standing in front of me as I sat on my desk after class one day. Although I can not remember the actual reason for our conversation, I can remember him saying to me that I needed a lot of love; whether this was because I was having ‘boy troubles’ at the time or not I am uncertain but those words have haunted me for over 35 years. This research has caused my teacher’s concerns to resurface and I wonder if, rather than love, he meant empathy. Like Sofia, my own mother had not been able to give me that empathic connection during my early infancy because she was still grieving for the son she lost thirteen months before my birth. As a result I became overly sensitive to the needs of others, particularly my mother, and seemed to be always searching for acceptance. Many of the fag hags that I know also seem to be searching for something but rather than a love relationship, it could be that they are searching for the acceptance that they did not receive from their mother in those early days of life. In the interviews I have conducted for this research, one common theme is the empathy women say they feel for a gay man’s struggle to find his place in the world. On the subject of her empathy with gay men, Amber (Appendix) explains,
I feel a connection with gay men … a natural empathy with their struggle for self” (p. 6)

Amber also describes empathy with her gay friends when she describes herself as

‘a person who easily empathizes with men who have gone through (and continue to go through) the pain of homophobia and ‘coming out’ (p. 6).

While Amber is able to succinctly identify her empathy with gay men, other women allude to it by saying that they can feel the pain their gay friends suffer, or that they can see how hard it is to be gay in a straight world.

In his study on empathy, psychologist Roy Schafer (1959) remarks that, until recently, there has not been much research carried out on the concept empathy, although it is regarded as important in child development as well as our personal relationships. Schafer defines empathy as ‘the inner experience of sharing in and comprehending the momentary psychological state of another person’ (p. 343). In other words, when we say that we empathize with someone we mean that we experience their pleasure or pain in the same way that they feel it. In his paper, *A Theory of Therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships*, Carl Rodgers (1959) expands Schafer’s definition, saying:

the state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this ‘as if’ quality is lost, then the state is one of identification (pp. 210-211).

In adult life, it would seem that some women, who have experienced an empathic failure with their mothers, become overly sensitive to others’ internal states in their search for empathic connection.
The fag hag’s search for the empathic Other

Following the symbiotic period, where the infant sees itself as fused with the mother, the child then enters into the next phase of development, which Flax (1978) refers to as ‘differentiation’ (p. 174). During this stage, the child takes pleasure in its own motor skills although it still needs reassurance and the approval of mother. During this period of development, the child takes pleasure in learning new skills but still needs its mother’s support and encouragement and in the last stage of development which Flax refers to as ‘individuation’ (p. 174) the child learns that it is separate from mother and develops its own independence. However, Nancy Chodorow (1978) believes that daughters are projections or extensions of their mothers and in this way, never truly separate from her. Daughters therefore learn to define themselves as connected to others so that ‘the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world; the basic masculine sense of self is separate’ (p. 169). So, for the daughter who fails to separate and individuate from her mother, life is always seen as being connected to others who may not be able to provide the nurturance and autonomy that she needed but did not receive from mother.

Some women look for an almost impossible combination of nurturance and autonomy in their adult relationships and although this ‘need for nurturance is not neurotic…it can lead to self-defeating behaviour under certain conditions…’ (Flax, 1978, p. 171). It seems that some women are able to cope well when the person they love becomes distant and withdraws their love. There may be a period of mourning for love lost but the pain of rejection dissipates quickly and the woman is soon able to regain her confidence and enjoyment of life, yet, for others rejection means humiliation and they may withdraw into deep depression. It would seem, therefore, that those women who can accept rejection and move on are not specifically dependant on another for their own sense of self. These women would then be those who had successfully completed those early processes of separation and individuation. On the other hand, those women who live in hope of a loving reunion and find it impossible to overcome their grief, might be seen to be examples of women whose separation from mother and formation of individuality have been seriously compromised during early infancy. It might be said that, like Electra, these women forever mourn a loss which they cannot describe.
When the symbiotic bond is tenuous or fails in some way, the daughter can be left with a weak or distorted sense of self and the adult relationships that she forms may be unsatisfactory. In this case, when an adult relationship fails, instead of being able to accept the situation and move on the woman will experience this loss as traumatic. One explanation for this could be that she is suffering from the sadness that is melancholia. According to Kristeva (1989) melancholia is experienced when the mother is not available to satisfy the child’s needs in the symbiotic period and as a result of this absence, the young girl suffers a loss that she does not have the language to describe. This loss of the mother during the symbiotic period might be seen in the way that many of the women in this study found it difficult to talk about their relationship with their mothers. While some did not answer the questions I asked about their mothers, other women’s answers were guarded and cryptic and the reasons for this may be found by taking into account the ambivalence that seems prevalent in many of the stories above.

The women’s reluctance to talk about their relationship with their mothers could be one way of avoiding the pain that the relationship causes them or it could be that they choose to avoid talking about the unpleasant feelings that they experience when discussing their bond with mother. However, it could also be that this inability to talk about their relationship with their mothers might mean these women could be experiencing melancholia because according to Kristeva (1989) ‘they do not consider themselves wronged but afflicted with a fundamental flaw, a congenital deficiency’ (p. 12). In other words, the melancholic can not name her loss but feels empty – something is missing but she can not name it. Melancholia arises from the period of abjection which a child must traverse in order to become a subject. According to Kristeva, the period of abjection occurs before the acquisition of language and during this time the child must overcome its dependency on mother and separate from her. However, if abjection is not successfully completed the child will suffer a life time of mourning the loss of some Thing it can not name.

Elsa’s (Appendix) story demonstrates an underlying problem in her relationship with her mother but she prefers to speak about her admiration for her mother instead. The death of Elsa’s father when she was six meant that her mother had to go to work and
so Elsa was left to deal with the trauma alone. While Elsa loves her mother she alludes to some underlying uncertainty in their relationship when she confesses,

I grew up with a single Mum and a little brother - 3 years younger. My father committed suicide when I was 6. My Mum is a survivor, and although only a poorly-paid secretary, she provided my brother and me with all the necessities and more. I left home to go to university at 18. I had a happy childhood, on the whole. My Mum and I have not resolved a lot of things; the tie is too close, I think.

Elsa describes the bond with her mother as ‘too close’ which could be a sign that she did not successfully separate from her mother and is therefore stuck in that transitional, pre/lingual state of abjection and as a result the relationship that Elsa still feels fused (‘too close’) with her mother. Because she has been unable to traverse that abject period Elsa is unable to identify those things that trouble her because she does not have the language to describe them.

Kristeva (1989) explains that while the child may recover from symbiotic loss and lead a normal, healthy childhood, later in life when she suffers some form of trauma she will sink into a deep depression that is far greater than that which would be considered appropriate to its cause. Kristeva calls this type of melancholia ‘narcissistic depression’, which is the mourning of something that is lost and if the loss occurs in those initial months after birth the child will suffer a ‘narcissistic wound’ (p. 60) which will impede its access to subjectivity. This means that because the child has not been able to complete the abject phase of development she can not properly distinguish between subject and object, effectively leaving her stuck in that transitional abject space. I would argue that this narcissistic depression might be regarded as a form of simmering shame that a girl carries with her into adult life and because of this, all future instances of shame might be experienced as excessive.

It might be that those women, who suffer from simmering shame or melancholia, experience themselves as defective and unlovable. In this regard, I will also discuss the fag hag and her relationship to shame because it is becoming increasingly noticeable in this research that the narcissistic wound that is suffered in that first few
months after birth is related to shame and the way that an adult woman interacts with those around her. Therefore, it may be possible that the fag hag identity is one that may be adopted by a woman who has not experienced a satisfying relationship with mother yet still desires a ‘sense of fusion with a caring, reliable person’ (Flax, 1978, p. 179). Maybe, because of her narcissistic depression, the close scrutiny and judgments that accompany an adult sexual relationship do not offer a woman the unconditional love that she seeks but many fag hags are able to find this in their relationship with a gay man.

While Flax (1978) asserts that it is exclusively through the relationships we have with other women that we can heal psychological wounds that might have originated in early infancy, Nancy Friday (1977) counters that it is those very relationships with women that we avoid. Friday says that our mother teaches us very early in our development that other women can not be trusted but rather they are to be considered as rivals and competitors in our quest to find love. Women who adopt the fag hag identity seem to be able to solve this tension by choosing gay men as friends. Amber (Appendix) says that she feels

more comfortable with boys than girls. My parents taught me to be self-reliant and to value intelligence and talent rather an appearance, which as I grew older often put me at odds with female friends but bonded me with men (p. 5).

Other women in this study confess that they do not trust other women or straight men but have no problems trusting their gay male friends. As Sofia (Appendix) explains,

I seem to trust gay men more than I trust females…there are no ulterior motives behind the relationship (p. 28).

Lorraine (Appendix) admits that she does not like to be around women who are not similar to herself but that her gay male friends have helped her through times when her female friends have deserted her. As a result, she reveals,

I don’t speak to any of my three bridesmaids, nor do I speak to my daughter’s godmother. But I still have my gays (p. 23).
Flax (1978) believes that ‘the rift between identifying with the mother and being oneself can only be closed within a relationship in which one is nurtured for being one’s autonomous self’ (p. 179). Many women look for this nurturance in a heterosexual relationship but find it impossible because in the patriarchal family men are independent and regarded as providers whereas women are supposed to be dependant and care for others both physically and emotionally. Instead, the fag hag is able to find this nurturance and autonomy in a relationship with gay men because they do not conform to patriarchal expectations of what a man should be. Anissa (Appendix) says,

There is a boost in self esteem from knowing that there is someone who loves you and allows you to be your unique self (p. 3)

and Amber (Appendix) agrees;

Gay men have always made me feel completely comfortable in who I am, which has then given me the strength to be myself in any situation (p. 5)

Dianna (Appendix) loves her gay friends, even though, at times, they can be a bit annoying.

They can be whiney, self centered and a bit selfish but you can always count on your gay friends to build you up when you are down and they have a nurturing quality whereas a straight man generally can’t do this (p. 17)

while Lesley (Appendix) thinks that:

gay men give more emotional support’ and ‘you are accepted no matter what. There are no great expectations – that’s what I love about gay men and I find that they are a little bit more in touch with their feminine side (p. 25).

These women show that it is possible to have a relationship with another that will allow for the autonomy and nurturance that Flax and Friday discuss. It would seem
likely then, that for these women, the relationships that they form with gay men in some way compensate for the lack of nurturance and autonomy that they did not receive from their mother in the early stages development.

**Adult relationships**

It might be that some of those women who adopt the fag hag identity spend their lives trying to satisfactorily complete that initial bond with the mother but because she might not have been able to help them do this initially, they find it an impossible task. As a result, the woman may find herself forming relationships that are unsatisfactory and resemble the incomplete maternal bond. During the course of the interviews in this study, I found that shame also seemed evident in many of the stories about adult relationships and in particular to fears of closeness and exposure of self. Sofia (Appendix) confesses that she only feels comfortable with men who rely on her and explains

> as soon as they feel like they’re becoming more than someone relying on me I sabotage it and it’s over (p. 27)

Sofia sees herself as a strong, independent woman who had to care for and protect both her mother and younger brother and it seems that now, when she feels that a relationship might expose her as vulnerable or dependant, she walks away from it. Gay men provide her with a relationship in which she remains the strong, independent child and she admits that,

> Gay men always provide a drama of some sort so that obviously appeals to my nurturing nature as I love to get involved in their dramas (whether they lost their favorite t-shirt or are having a major life crisis (p. 28)

Consequently, Sofia still sees herself as the same caring, nurturing little girl who looked after her mother and little brother. However, it might also be that, in the absence of her mother’s recognition of her needs, Sofia has developed a type of masochistic self who can not differentiate between her own wants and those of others (Benjamin, 1988).
As a young girl, Dianna (Appendix) grew up with a lot of ‘uncles’ and reveals that after a string of young boyfriends in high school she gravitated towards older men for companionship because she had learnt from an early age how to ‘entertain men with cute stories’ (p. 15). When Dianna became pregnant at the age of seventeen, her parents insisted that she marry the baby’s father whom she met in a gay bar but the marriage did not last and after having another baby she ‘escaped to northern New South Wales to lead a hippy lifestyle (p. 16). Dianna has problems maintaining a steady relationship and says, ‘I am not in a relationship at the moment because I joke that I have either married or divorced every eligible person in this town!’ (p. 17). Dianna’s admission that she jokes about her inability to maintain a relationship is one of the ways that she is able to place the shame connected with failed relationships under her own control using the attach self tactic of the compass of shame (Nathanson 1992). The fact that Dianna has had so many partners could also be explained by using Nathanson’s script theory which suggests that Dianna might copy her mother’s early promiscuous lifestyle as a way of avoiding the shame attached to her low sense of self that could come from her mother’s absence during the symbiotic period.

Billie (Appendix) believes that her mother was a beautiful woman. She describes her mother as ‘the epitome of femininity’ (p. 30) who loved music and dancing and yet struggled to support herself and her daughter. Billie did not know her father and when her mother remarried, it was to a man who hated her young daughter and treated her like a burden. When her mother sided with her new husband in the ensuing arguments, Billie slowly grew to hate her as well. When I spoke with Billie (Appendix) about her sexual relationships she revealed that she had remained a virgin throughout high school and that admitted that when it comes to love; ‘I can’t stay in a relationship to save my life’ (p. 30). It might be that as a young child, Billie held the belief that she was not loved because of her step father’s hatred and her mother’s betrayal of her, and according to Nathanson (1992) these feelings of not being loved are part of the cognitive phase of shame that has a relation to our ‘wishes and fears about closeness’ (p. 317). This means that, because of the absence of love in her family relationships, Billie believes that she is unlovable because a sexual relationship exposes us to another; she avoids any experience that is associated with being in a close relationship with others.
Some of the women in this study did not want to talk about their adult relationships and Bonnie (Appendix) is one example. At first, she did not want to talk about her own relationships and instead put some distance between herself and her opinions by speaking objectively and this avoidance also suggests feelings of shame. Bonnie explained that:

relationships for a huge majority of women, suck...and have either stunted their growth or ruined their lives by abuse of many variations and if you’re reasonably smart, even slightly ambitious and even semi open minded you can place an even bet that some guy will claim to fall in love with you and immediately try to change you, your wardrobe, your hair color or your relationships with others.. And worst of all, if you do find the guy of your dreams well then what if he’s not attracted to you? Do you spend the rest of your life settling or compromising what you want in a man cause now the pop psych books tell you your standards are to high? (p. 35)

But a bit later in the interview Bonnie (Appendix) admitted to having a relationship with a couple of straight men. However she explains that these relationships were over before they began because of the men’s expectations that she would jump straight into bed with them or watch pornographic films. She says:

I hate getting hit on constantly it gives me the creeps...Flirting is flattering to a polite point but no man seems to understand the cut off point which is no I’m not interested! (p. 35)

Bonnie admits that she sabotages sexual relationships before they even begin but does not seem to have a problem with flirting because it allows for an expression of sexual interest without the risk of possible humiliation, shame or rejection that results from an actual sexual encounter. One of the tactics that we use in order to alleviate experiences of shame is to avoid any further shame and Bonnie’s story suggests that she avoids any possibility of any intimacy by not entering into a physical relationship. These stories suggest that the shame that can arise from sexual relationship might have its origins in that early, symbiotic relationship with mother. According to his research into family relationships and shame in *The Many Faces of Shame*, Andrew
Morrison (1987) explains that if the female infant fails to receive an empathetic connection with mother, it is more than likely she will turn to her father. In this way, ‘the father’s presence as an accepting, comforting figure [who] represents the ‘second chance’ at self-cohesion through idealization and soothing’ (Morrison, 1988, p. 275).

The Father/Daughter relationship

An investigation of existing literature on the father/daughter relationship seems to ultimately result in reference to Freud’s oedipal complex which relies on the centrality of the father. The oedipal complex is based on a girl’s move away from the mother and identification with the father who symbolically represents the outside world (Benjamin, 1991). In her article, ‘Empathy and identification: Conceptual resources for feminist fieldwork’, Liz Bondi (2003) explains that ‘identification is a process through which [we] absorb and incorporate aspects or attributes of others, metabolizing this material to generate [our] own identity’ (p. 68). Similarly, Diana Fuss (as cited in Thompson, 2004) discusses the difference between identification and identity commenting that ‘identification with’ precedes identity and can be regarded as a ‘detour through the other that defines the self’ (p. 43). In other words, it is through identification with her father that a girl can form a sense of who she is in the world. It is possible that the young girl may turn to her father as a result of empathic failure which results from either the physical or emotional absence of her mother; but for some of the women in this study, the father is also absent. In his article, ‘The psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic personality disorders’, Heinz Kohut (1968) explains that the absence or unavailability of the parent or parents in the early life of the child can create narcissistic injury and fixation. A parent’s absence in a child’s early life as a result of death, divorce or illness can therefore be taken into account as one of the contributing factors to narcissistic disturbances which contribute to a fractured sense of self that can affect identity and self esteem.

A child’s positive and cohesive sense of self is produced through the admiring gaze of the parents and, according to Kohut (1971), in order to achieve this a child needs not only the admiring mirroring response that is found in the mother’s gaze but also a sense of well-being that comes from a merger or bond with an idealized other who represents strength and perfection; this idealized other is usually the father or a father figure. Kohut argues that, for many years, the child’s positive sense of self and self
esteem is dependent on admiring, empathically responsive others. In this respect, these loving others are not seen as separate to the child but experienced as a part of the self and Kohut describes these loving others as ‘self objects’. If parents are unavailable to provide these functions of mirroring and idealization, the child may feel as if there is something missing which may lead to, what Kohut (1972) terms ‘narcissistic rage’ and Kristeva (1995) refers to as a ‘narcissistic wound’ which can be experienced as depression and low self esteem. One way of thinking about the consequences of an absent mother and father for the daughter can be understood by re-visiting the myth of Electra. Electra’s mother did not provide an admiring gaze for her daughter but instead dressed her in the clothes of slavery which resulted in her melancholic or depressed state and this becomes evident in her excessive mourning for her father. Electra’s unceasing tears for her dead father suggest that she suffers from the simmering shame that resulted from her inability to successfully leave the abject period between symbiosis and separation. Kristeva (1995) describes Electra’s dilemma as ‘torn between identification with paternal words and buried unrepresentable maternal affects’ (p. 71). So Electra did not get the chance to escape the abject space that she inhabited because, not only was her mother unable to guide her through the process of separation but also because her father’s death meant that he was not able to provide Electra with a positive sense of self by showing her that she was valued and loved.

Throughout the interviews for this research, I found that most of the women did not speak a great deal about their fathers but those who did only made brief mention of him and did not talk about their relationship with him. This lack of detail about the father/daughter relationship does not have the same implications as that of the silence that surrounded the mother/daughter relationship because it does not seem to reveal any ambivalence. One reason for this could be that in the patriarchal family the father is regarded as the provider and therefore men spend a great deal of time at work but fathers are also absent because of divorce, illness and death. For example, Elsa’s father died when she was six years old while Sofia’s father was an alcoholic and Lesley’s father was in the Navy and spent most of the year away from home. Billie (Appendix) explains that her father left her mother early in his daughter’s life, commenting,
I never really knew my father too well, he was gone by the time I began to realize that he was never coming back (p.30)

However, Billie did get the chance to meet her father when she was a teenager but reveals that he was a ‘huge disappointment’ (p. 31). Billie was reunited with her father because she had been unable to accept her step father and explains that at first she believed that her mother’s new husband would be the father that she had never known, but this man hated her and treated her as if she was a burden. Billie seems to have compensated for her absent father and problematic relationship with her step father by becoming involved in school activities saying:

I flourished in high school. I had mediocre grades but I was Vice President of my senior class. ‘Miss Junior’ in the Homecoming court. My teachers loved me and I was quite popular with the student body. I was voted most ‘Talented’ in my class (p. 31).

It would seem that, although Billie’s father was not able to either show his daughter that she is loved and valued or introduce her to the social world she seems to have done it herself by creating her own world with the assistance of her best gay male friend.

My research suggest that, in instances where the father is also unavailable either emotionally or physically, the resultant melancholia or depression that Kristeva (1995) and Kohut (1971, 1972) describe might well be a defining characteristic in the identity of the fag hag. As mentioned earlier, in the absence of the mother during the symbiotic period, the girl turns to her father in order to receive this affirmation that she is loved and admired but if father is also absent, then the girl might spend her life looking for someone who will provide her with a parent’s admiring gaze. For many young girls, this platonic form of love can often be found in their brothers or, in the absence of a brother, another significant male family member or friend. I propose that, in the event that this initial process of identification can not be accommodated by the father due to his own absence, then it seems that the girl may turn to another platonic male. For some girls this could be a brother, but for those who do not have a brother, it might mean an uncle or cousin while for others, this might mean the little boy next door. Some women in this study reveal that, in their younger years, their
friendships were mainly with boys but as they both mature it seems to be that the dynamics of the friendship change from unconditional platonic love to sexual expectation. This could mean that later in life when a woman is traumatized by a sexual relationship she seeks out that unconditional love that she once found in her pre-pubescent bonding with boys.

**The sister and brother in Greek mythology**

Although some research has been carried out on sibling relationships, investigations seem to only take into account Freud’s (1916, 1917) reference to the hostile aspects of rivalry that develop as a result of competition for the parents’ love. However, Hinshelwood and Winship (2006) believe that more research should be conducted on the importance of sibling relationships and the power that they exert; that it is time to ‘contemplate a paradigm shift in psychoanalysis where the centrality of the Oedipus myth is balanced by sibling relations’ (p. 78). In my research, this power seems to come from an alliance between the brother and sister that can affectively overthrow the symbolic order. This means that the alliance between brother and sister is a type of social relationship which is based on strength because the coalition that they form is born in their devotion to one another. So, instead of feelings of hostility and ambivalence that weaken relationships between parents and children, the bond between siblings is based on the strength of their union. Where the Oedipal myth revolves around the story of Oedipus as an only child, the myth of Electra and Orestes offers a model for talking about the brother-sister relationship. Hinshelwood and Winship (2006) discuss the bond between Electra and Orestes by comparing it to Freud’s (1953) analysis of the bond between brothers in *Totem and Taboo*. These authors explain that the relationship between Electra and Orestes is, a social extension of the Oedipus complex. After the overthrow of the patriarch [in Freud’s (1953) *Totem and Taboo*], the brothers formed a unifying bond derived from the guilt of homicide. However, in the case of Orestes and Electra, the overthrow is of mother and the homicidal horde is the fraternity of brother-sister (p. 81).

So, while Freud speaks of a bond of brothers that is based on the guilt arising from homicide, Electra and Orestes are brought together by their mutual rage in a ‘love-
devotional bond’ (p. 83). In this respect the relationship between Electra and Orestes ‘offers a more intimate window into the democratic exchange between siblings’ (p. 81). It seems that when father is not available to provide identification for the daughter, a platonic male relationship that is either familial or platonic in nature, might be able to provide the girl with some one to identify with. As Thompson (2004) explains, when we identify with someone we incorporate some of their characteristics and mannerisms and so it could be said that the other person functions as a type of metaphorical mirror, in whom we are able to define our own sense of self. In this instance, those that the girl identifies with can provide her with a sense of worth that father was not able to provide. For example, although Anissa does not talk about her parents and early family life during our interview she refers to herself as a tomboy who saw herself as an extension of her brother.

Anissa’s comment is common amongst many of the women in this study who describe their relationship with brothers and gay men in terms of a metaphorical mirror. For example, Anissa’s words bring to mind a mirror of identification in which she sees herself as a part of her brother. In this respect, although I refer to a mirror in this study, I will not be using the psychoanalytic Lacanian mirror because it is related to oedipal theories which do not fit my analysis of the fag hag. In the next chapter, I will discuss the concept of gay sociability as a symbolic mirror for the father but for Electra, this might mean that in the absence of her father, Orestes becomes the mirror that validates her as a loving other. While the relationship between Electra and her mother has been discussed elsewhere in this research, I look at the bond between Electra and Orestes as a way of examining the brother/sister alliance. Electra had become a surrogate mother to her brother after their father’s death and her mother was fearful of the power that this union represented, so much so that she sent Orestes away when he was a young man. Electra’s loyalty to her brother, Orestes, exceeds her bond with her mother and this is evident in the brother and sister’s conspiracy against Clytemnestra, their mother, in order to avenge the murder of their father. The bond between the two siblings in this story can provide a model for explaining relational dynamics, for example, when Electra became her brother’s carer in the absence of their mother. This story brings to mind Sofia’s care for her brother because of her mother’s alcoholism. Like the Electra myth Sofia’s relationship with her brother can
be seen as an alliance against the destructive parent-child and mother-father relationships in her early life.

The story of Antigone can be used as another example of a girl whose loyalty to her dead brother caused her to defy the patriarchal law and suffer the ultimate penalty of death. Antigone was the daughter of King Oedipus and Jocasta and the main character in a tragedy of the same name written by Sophocles around 442 BC. The play begins with the death of Antigone’s two brothers, Etocles and Polyneices who were the leaders of opposing sides in the civil war. The new leader of Thebes, Creon, decreed that Etocles would be honored and buried as a hero while Polyneices was to be left on the battlefield, unburied, as punishment for his disloyalty. When Antigone begged her sister to help her Ismene reminded Antigone ‘we are women; it is not for us to fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we and we must obey in this’ (cited in Watling, 1947, p. 128). These two women provide models for thinking about different performances of femininity that are still relevant today because, while Ismene remained faithful to patriarchal values and laws even though this meant abandoning her sister, Antigone defied those same laws and in doing so remained loyal to her brother who has been exiled. Antigone’s loyalty to her brother is also a model for the fag hag who remains loyal to her gay male friend even though he has been cast out by patriarchal society and as a result of her devotion the fag hag is also exiled.

After Creon discovered that it was Antigone who had stolen Polyneices’ body and buried it he questioned her but she refused to deny her actions saying ‘I admit it, I do not deny it’ (Watling, 1947, p. 138). Antigone then argued with Creon about the ethics of his law and infuriated the ruler who ordered that she be banished and imprisoned in a cave far from Thebes where she would slowly starve to death. By using logic, which is not considered to be a feminine characteristic by patriarchy, Antigone had threatened not only Creon’s position as all powerful ruler by proving his law unjust, but she also threatened his masculinity with her refusal to remain silent. In speaking out and using logic against Creon, Antigone claimed subjectivity and agency and this performance of unruliness can also be seen in the way that fag hags tend to unsettle patriarchal norms with the ‘desire to be active agents of their
own destiny rather than to be simply passive subjects of men’s agency’ (Sayers, 1986, p.168).

While Electra and Antigone align with their brothers in defiance of patriarchal laws, Athene can be seen as another model for the fag hag identity because she identified not only with her brothers but also with men in general. Athene was the goddess of the hunt, a Creator goddess and according to myth, immediately after her own birth, acted as a midwife for the birth of her twin brother, Apollo (Harris & Platzner, 2004, p. 194). In Aeschylus’s play the *Eumenides*, Athene revealed that ‘she habitually takes the part of men – except for marrying one’ (Harris and Platzner, 2004, p. 191). Athene’s ‘perpetual virginity…is a sign of her autonomy and independence [and] her foiling of Hephaestus’s attempted rape reflects her resolve to maintain a life free of male domination, save that of her father’ (Harris & Platzner, 2004, p. 191). The goddess is associated with Hecate and regarded as the ‘guardian of women’s groups, such as the Amazons… [and] has powers that threaten male hegemony’ (Harris & Platzner, 2004, p. 196). It has been said that, apart from her close bond with her brother, Athene did not have lasting relationships with men.

These myths show that the brother sister bond is one that sometimes supersedes all others, including the parental relationship. In the book *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature*, Joanna Mink (1993) refers to the brother-sister relationship as,

…unique, irreplaceable. With our siblings we share the greatest possible degree of similarity (based on the sameness of the gene pool, on shared family history, and so on), plus since in the natural order of things our parents die before we do, it is a relationship that can not be replicated (p. 1).

Mink goes on to explain that one of the reasons Oedipus suffered such horror at learning that he had married his mother and fathered her children was his dilemma of identification as either father or brother to the children. In the field of psychoanalysis the relationship between parent and child is referred to as vertical, while the sibling bond is usually referred to as a lateral or horizontal relationship. Therefore, according to Coles’ (2006) theory, Oedipus had a vertical as well as a horizontal relationship.
with these children being both their father and their brother and this conundrum was one of the reasons for his exile and loneliness.

**The sister/brother relationship**

According to Jessica Benjamin (1998) ‘girls’ ambivalence around separation may be more intense than that of boys because of the bond of likeness between mother and daughter – all the more reason for them too, to seek a different object in whom to recognize their independence’ (p. 37). Freud believed that the relationship was based on rivalry between the two siblings but Prophecy Coles (2006) suggests that psychoanalysts should consider this to also be a ‘bond of devotion’ (p. 76). Jennifer Silverstone (2006) maintains that there is very little written about siblings and their roles as ‘significant internal objects’ (p. 226) and offers the opinion that, ‘where … there is an absence of mind in the mother…where the family carries a trauma, siblings can become central to the internal world’ (p. 225).

Jennifer Silverstone believes that, in certain manifestations of an absent mother there is a ‘lack of lived experience, and along with it a sense of going on being; but that this can be mediated by the sibling relationship’ (p. 226). Silverstone talks about her experiences with the psychoanalysis of patients whose families suffer from some type of trauma or ‘there is a lack of the ability of the mother to keep her child in mind [because] part of the maternal function is in creating and re-creating the narrative of the child’s life’ (p. 225). Often, when mother is absent, this function is adopted by the oldest child who can then provide its siblings with narratives of their lives. Silverstone refers to three clinical cases where patients’ attachments to siblings have overshadowed that of the attachment to mother and states that even in cases where there is no real sibling, a phantasy sibling can exist. In the case of those girls who have no brother this can mean an internalized phantasy of the brother and consequently a greater identification with boys. In Chapter Five of Coles’ book, ‘The replacement child syndrome’, Harriet Thistlethwaite (2006) discusses what she refers to as the ‘replacement child’ (p. 123) who is usually born less than a year after the death of a previous child and according to Alicia Etchegoyen (1997), the implications for the surviving child range from ‘the mother’s inability to care for the baby to confusion with the dead child, rejection, neglect and enduring problems associated with a sense of identity’ (p. 199). This brings to mind my own story which, until
now, I have refrained from telling and maybe this is a sign of my own narcissistic wound.

My own mother had given birth to a boy the year before I was born, but my brother died when he was only four days old. I do not think that my mother and father ever overcame their grief and as a result I strived to be a replacement for the boy they had lost. As a young child, I played football and rode my bike with the boys in our street and in later years I tried my best to learn about cars and motors. I loved playing in the dirt and ‘rumbling’ with the boys. So, it would seem that in cases where there is no brother-sister relationship within the family, some women gravitate more towards friendships with boys and the tomboy performance; some even allude to the fact that they act for the absent son. Amber (Appendix) grew up with a lot of male friends and in some ways stood in for the son that her father never had:

It is certainly the fact that I was a bit of a tomboy….growing up I had a lot of male friends and a couple of really close friends who were male. I always felt more comfortable with boys than girls. I think a lot of the male influence in my life was my father who taught me to be self sufficient but also thought that as he didn’t have a son he would teach me to do ‘boy’ things and as a result when I played with other children I tended to gravitate towards the boys more than the girls but I still had female friends but probably when I played with other kids I would rather do what the boys were doing rather than the girls were doing (p. 5).

Dianna was the oldest child in her family and while she was very close to her father she also had a lot of male influence in her life. Dianna (Appendix) explains,

I always seemed to be more close to men. My father had a lot of male friends much younger than him, as he managed a national football team and remained involved in the Sydney horse racing scene (p. 15)

Therefore, it would seem that women who do not have a brother compensate for his absence by substituting male companions. It is important to remember that the bonds these young girls form with boys are platonic and exist in the innocence of youth except in the case of Dianna who says that the male influences in her life were all
older men but for Dianna too, these relationships were platonic with the men taking on the role of an uncle.

One sibling relationship that can be seen to be an example of the close bond that forms between a sister and brother is that of Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo. In her book *Sister and Brother*, Brenda Wineapple (2008) tells of the close relationship that Gertrude enjoyed with her brother, Leo. Gertrude was two years younger than Leo and as she later recalled they had ‘always been together’ (p. 22). Wineapple explains that ‘their feelings toward each other were as emphatic as any they experienced for others. She admired him, she felt as protective of him as he did for her; she identified with him. They were confederates, they were friends, they presumed sexual neutrality’ (p. 37). Both children believed that they were living replacements of their older siblings who had died soon after birth and ‘even their mother thought of them as a pair and sent them everywhere together - Leo was both companion and chivalrous protector of his younger sister’ (p. 23). Their mother died from cancer when both children were young although she was barely spoken about by either of her children except in *The Making of Americans* where Gertrude referred to their relationship with their mother as distant while Leo is said to have referred to her as ‘insignificant’ (p. 24).

In this example, it could be considered that, because of the loss of her two children, Gertrude and Leo’s mother was in mourning and therefore emotionally absent for both of her living children. As the father is not mentioned it is presumed that he too was absent if not from their lives, then at least from their family narrative. The siblings formed their own alliance against their mother that was based on companionship and Leo’s protection of his sister.

Many of the women participating in this research project tell similar stories of their identification with a brother. Anissa (Appendix) reports that she had a ‘…very strong sense of protectiveness from [her] brother and his friends…’ (p. 1) and when Lesley’s (Appendix) father was stricken with Huntingdon’s Disease her mother would have spent much of her time attending to his needs so, as a result, the Lesley explains that she developed a close relationship with her step brother. Elsa’s (Appendix) father committed suicide when she was six years old and she devoted herself to her younger brother, looking after him while their mother was at work. Sofia’s (Appendix) father
was alcoholic and also unable to provide his children with love and support so Sofia and her brother formed a close bond that was based on the nurturing that Sofia provided because her mother was unable to cope with her husband’s addiction as well as two small children. Casey (Appendix) also felt strongly connected to her brother and explains that she ‘doted on him…the family album is full of photos of me cuddling and ‘mothering’ him’ (p. 13).

Therefore it seems that, as a result of a lack of parental attention, the young girl may align herself with a brother or brother figure and it is this relationship that not only results in her unruly gender performance but also her adult relationship with a gay man. For many women, the brother/sister relationship is one that is based on a sexually neutral bond and transcends that of mother/daughter and father/daughter. The stories told by the women in this study illustrate that, as young girls, their main alliances were with boys and later, when sexual trauma caused their simmering shame to surface, it now appears that these women unconsciously sought the safety of that previous non sexual bond they had experienced with boys. So it is possible that there are many reasons that may lead to a woman’s identification with a gay man. In the next chapter I will discuss the adult woman and her relation to melancholy, trauma and the abject which ultimately lead to her withdrawal from heteronormative society and seek asylum in a particular kind of gay community. It will be shown that some women identify with gay men following a traumatic sexual encounter, because this relationship closely resembles the safe, non sexual bond that they once shared with a brother.
CHAPTER THREE - THE FAG HAG’S CLOSET

You have stuck by me now and then,
Even though you know I like men.
We are so close, my sweet fag hag,
Sometimes I think you are me in drag!

Margaret Cho (2001:41)

Chapter Two discussed the possibility that the etiology of the fag hag might be the result of unresolved early psychological conflicts, either during the symbiotic, oedipal or post oedipal periods of development and in some cases, all three. These conflicts arise from either the emotional or physical absence of mother and father and are resolved by an alliance with the brother or other significant platonic male relationship. This chapter will take up this investigation from the perspective of the adult woman and her relationship with heteronormativity and sexuality. It would seem that, in some cases, the depression that accompanies the ‘narcissistic wound’, (2004, p. 60) that McAfee associates with the pre-oedipal relationship with mother, can re-appear in times of trauma later in adult life and as a result, a woman might subsequently seek a relationship with the imaginary father. In the case of the fag hag, it might be that ‘the agency of the loving third, the imaginary father, can be interpreted as a supportive space within the social a positive image of oneself as loved and lovable…’ (Oliver, 2002, p. 50). The gay man, in this instance, becomes a substitute for the brother with whom the fag hag can enjoy a platonic, protective bond. The gay man also reveals a different version of masculinity and provides an opportunity for the woman to access the symbolic imaginary father, that supportive space in a gay community that can offer her empathy and nurturance.

This chapter will also investigate whether the fag hag identity is one of queerness, quintessentially located within a liminal space that is related to the abject and renders her as an example of ‘the monstrous feminine’ (Creed, 1993). The particular liminal space that the fag hag occupies is outside patriarchal norms and could be regarded as a ‘distinct, dangerous and polluting margin, dangerous in the symbolic sense of mingling the sacred with the profane’ (Hetherington, 1996, p. 42). As a queer
identity, it will be shown that the fag hag represents the ambiguous in not only her performance of gender, which distinguishes her from other women, but also because she disturbs and unsettles the stability of the symbolic order. The fag hag questions the accepted gender performance of woman and also transgresses the boundaries between gay and straight so she unsettles categories and norms that relate to existing identities.

The fag hag is also witness within a gay community and in this regard her stories can act as a window into some areas of gay life and the complexities and difficulties that can accompany those who identify as gay within a patriarchal society. Another feature of the fag hag identity is her function as mediator between gay and straight cultures which can be viewed as one of the ways that she might be able to reciprocate the love and loyalty shown to her by her gay male friends. But, to begin, it would seem that the fag hag identity can be based in some form of sexual trauma that results in a woman’s temporary withdrawal from patriarchal society. Here I refer to the withdrawal from patriarchal society as temporary because it seems that some women who adopt a fag hag identity will eventually re-connect with heterosexuality albeit on a different level. However, it is important to remember that not all fag hags are heterosexual women and some of the women in this research identify as lesbian or bisexual. In these cases, the woman’s withdrawal is not from patriarchal norms but rather a withdrawal and subsequent reconnection to sexuality.

**The fag hag and Shame.**

In Chapter Two we saw how the trauma that the child experiences as a result of her mother’s absence can result in a depression that is ever present in her life and is the result of, what McAfee (2004), Kristeva (1989) and Kohut (1971, 1972) refer to as a form of narcissistic depression. This simmering shame can lie dormant until adult life when it will reappear with greater intensity than would be normally expected in the given situation. After an investigation of some of the stories in this research, it would seem that those incidents that cause excessive reactions to shame have to do with scripts relating to abandonment and self worth which can be traced back to the early relationship with mother and father. This suggests that incidents related to sexuality might bring about, not just shame, but humiliation and disgust and an investigation of
some of the stories related to this project shows this is one of the main reasons a woman might want to avoid further sexual relationships.

When we are in a sexual relationship we are, in effect, subjecting ourselves to the scrutiny of another person and because shame is connected to not only our view of ourselves but also how others see us, being in a love relationship exposes us to another. The enjoyment and excitement of sex can quickly turn to shame if we feel the other person sees us as imperfect and we can feel abandoned just as we did when mother was not available to us. Our response to this decrease in our enjoyment of the relationship will depend on the scripts we have stored regarding that first experience of abandonment. Most love relationships these days are also sexual relationships and ‘we must believe that this person is capable of accepting everything about us that will be opened to the view of self and other by the experience of arousal. Shame hovers everywhere in the bed of lust’ (Nathanson, 1992, p. 300). Sex leaves us open to the most brutal form of scrutiny because we are naked before another with nowhere to hide and for some women, this can be an intense trigger for shame affect. It would seem that most of the women in this study react to this type of shame by using those scripts that involve seeking out a non-sexual relationship with a man who will accept them in much the same way as a brother.

Sofia’s experiences with her fiancée left her with a distinct mistrust of men. I asked her if she thought that there were any significant events that might have contributed to her fag hag identity and lifestyle. Sofia (Appendix) replied,

At the age of 25 I was engaged. He was actually my first ‘real’ boyfriend – all relationships with straight males prior to this were totally physical. My fiancé was someone I’d known for 4 years as a friend and in that time he’d never had a girlfriend, and rarely even ‘picked up’ when he was out. I trusted him that he wasn’t a womanizer and thought that we were both similar with regard to previous relationships etc. We were living together; the afternoon I got home from wedding dress shopping he told me he was starting to freak out about our upcoming wedding and wanted some time to think. He walked out the door and I never saw him again. He was in fact cheating on me the whole time with someone he worked with…I believe that this, as well as my
promiscuous lifestyle in my late teens and early twenties, has been instrumental in my reluctance to commit to another relationship. I haven’t had a ‘real’ boyfriend since. I’ve had relationships with straight men, some long term, but as soon as they feel like they’re becoming more than someone relying on me I sabotage it and it’s over (p. 27).

In this instance, her fiancée’s betrayal might have resulted in the re-emergence of Sofia’s narcissistic depression causing her to consciously avoid that same type of commitment. This extreme reaction to betrayal means that Sofia is still single twenty years after this incident. Sofia also admits that she needs to be the carer in her relationships but fears becoming too close to men. The evidence of Sofia’s extreme avoidance of loving relationships can be seen in her earlier promiscuity which allowed her to have superficial encounters that were not permanent and did not involve any emotional investment on her part. Sofia’s lack of trust in straight men means that her circle of friends consists of mainly gay men now because, she feels that she can not trust either women or heterosexual men. In some way, gay men provide Sofia with the opportunity to not only regain some of her trust but also experience some form of emotional bond with another person although this does not yet extend to heteronormative relationships with men or, to some extent, women.

Lesley (Appendix) has had gay friends since she was a young teenager, long before she started going out with straight men and confides that a traumatic experience as a young child left her suspicious of straight men. It seems that an early traumatic encounter with sexuality has resulted in not only shame, but also disgust and Lesley uses tactics of avoidance and withdrawal in order to navigate around the pain that she associates with sexual encounters.

When I was 5 until [I was] about 11 [and] I got my periods (I matured a lot earlier than other girls) I was sexually abused on and off by a family friend and it affected me a lot – I didn’t realise how much until later but I had a lot of hang ups. I didn’t like people looking at me, I didn’t trust men – I didn’t allow myself to get sexually involved with anyone until I was about 17 or 18 a long time after I started going out with my gay friends. It affected me until I learnt that everything happens for a reason and that it happened at a time when I was vulnerable but I came to realise at a very young age that straight men aren’t very trustworthy and I found that the camp men that I hung out with
were. Straight men have double standards – they can look at you and say one thing but mean another. My distrust of men seems to always get in the way of my relationships with them and because of this I am still single, unable to commit to a lasting relationship (p. 26)

Sexual abuse at such a young age is more than likely to leave deep and permanent scars on the psyche and Lesley’s story gives many clues to the shame that she suffered at the hands of a family friend. As discussed in an earlier chapter, shame makes us want to hide to disappear from the gaze of the other and Lesley admits that she did not like people looking at her and that she withdrew from heteronormative involvement by socializing only with gay men until she was older. This withdrawal from the danger of heterosexual encounter might have allowed Lesley time to recover from her traumatic experiences and her relationship with gay men could also be one way that she eventually learned to reconnect with masculinity but only on tenuous ground. It could be that the sexual abuse suffered by such a young child has aroused feelings of disgust which precede the shame attached to the trauma of sexual abuse. As a result, Lesley adopts a strategy of disavowal or denial in order to avoid the discomfort of shame, a strategy which, according to Nathanson (1992) ‘operate[s] out of our awareness, in the realm of unconscious life’ (p. 338). Therefore disgust can be regarded as a precursor to shame which brings the desire to avoid further contact with its source and Lesley does this by avoiding any future encounters with sexuality. Lesley explains that she still does not trust straight men entirely and at 43 she is still single with many failed heterosexual relationships behind her.

Casey was not interested in dating boys when she was in high school; she thought that they were ‘immature and silly’. It was not until later that her real experiences with men made her withdraw from the dating scene. Casey (Appendix) explains,

The women’s college I attended was located near a Marine training base. Every weekend young Marine officers would descend on the college to pick up ‘chicks’, some for a pleasant evening of companionship, but most, 90% at least, just for a quick ‘lay.’ One guy I stupidly agreed to go out with proceeded to imbibe whiskey and paw me the minute we got into his car. It was all I could do to break free and run back to the dorm. Another one took me out to a movie, which turned out to be a hard-core porno flick.
(Unbelievably boring stuff!). And so it went with the next four Marines. Finally, I said enough is enough and opted to remain weekends in the dorm chatting with girl friends. Clearly, the swaggering, macho man I had come to know from experience was not the kind of guy I was looking for (p. 12).

The men in Casey’s story could be regarded as representative of a misogynistic form of masculinity that oppresses women and views them only as sexual objects. Casey reacted to their several attempts to seduce her by withdrawing into her dormitory room and seeking the company of other girls because these female/female relationships were safe from the threat of sexual encounter. During her later years at college, Casey says that she also met a few gay men whose performances of masculinity were ‘scary’ but it was the men who were gentle, sensitive and caring who helped her to overcome her fears and ultimately she married one of them. Casey’s story is different to those of the other women who identify with gay men because she married a gay man. It would seem that Casey has withdrawn from heteronormativity preferring to live her life permanently outside its borders. While Casey is representative of those women who provide the allusion of heterosexuality for their gay partners, Sofia and Lesley can be seen to be examples of fag hags who have experienced shame/humiliation in their encounters with heterosexual men so they chose to identify with someone who represents the safe, non-sexual relationship that they had with either a brother or other significant platonic male relationship.

**The Mirror**

The shame that the fag hag experiences at the hands of patriarchal law causes her to withdraw firstly from hegemonic performances of masculinity that, in one way or another, betrayed her and secondly from a society where those same hegemonic values are honored. By associating with gay men, the fag hag effectively disappears from heterosexuality and aligns herself with a person who may well know the feeling of being traumatized by patriarchal norms. In some ways this means that the relationship between a woman and gay man is grounded in the empathy that arises from their shared experiences of shame/humiliation. Gay men are familiar with shame and abjection because they, too, are considered abject by patriarchal society and shamed for their sexuality. Judith Halberstam (2009) explains ‘shame is a gendered form of sexual abjection, it belongs to the feminine’ (p. 226), and because gay men
are feminized and thereby considered abject in the eyes of heteronormative society they are able to empathize with the fag hag’s shame. In other words, the fag hag finds empathy with gay men because they are both decreed political exiles by patriarchal society. Because of this empathic connection, gay men are able to provide the type of platonic relationship that can offer a woman protection from further sexual shame and abandonment as well as offering the support and love that will form the basis for a more positive sense of self. In this respect, the relationship between a woman and a gay man can be regarded as familial not only because it is platonic but because it is also as loving and accepting of the woman as any genetic family bond. A loving family bond reduces the intensity and duration of shame and therefore in her relationship with a gay man, a woman is able to overcome the shame brought about as a result of sexual trauma. While women suffer shame because they do not conform to heteronormative standards, gay men are also judged as lacking and weak because they too, do not conform to patriarchal expectations. Therefore, while the alliance of women and gay men could be considered to be a bond founded on the sharing of an emotional experience, it is through identification with a gay man that the fag hag is able to ultimately find her own subjectivity and identity. As already discussed in Chapter Two, the initial identification with father leads to identity, but in the case of the absent father some women identify with other platonic male figures such as brothers or young boys. This results in the young girl adopting male characteristics which render her unruly in her performance of femininity. Unruly women are exiled from heteronormative society because they do not conform to an accepted notion of femininity.

It seems to me that gay men provide a brotherly mirror of empathy and love that mother and father were unable to provide and because of this the fag hag learns to empathize and love herself. During the course of this research I have come to know the women who have participated as independent people with a strong sense of self who care deeply about their gay friends and remain loyal to those who helped them to resolve their simmering shame. Therefore, it seems that the relationship between women and gay men is one way that a woman is able to reconnect with confidence in her own version of sexuality on her own terms. For the straight woman, this would mean an eventual reconnection with sexuality albeit on a more confident level to her previous experiences and many of the women in this study have shown that this can
be done. In an attempt to follow up on my interviews, I contacted the women in this study in order to test the ideas that have surfaced late in this research. It appears that while some of the women still prefer the safety of an exclusive platonic relationship with gay men, others have made the reconnection, are more confident in their interaction with others and feel that the relationships that they enter into now include the autonomy and nurturance that they experienced with gay men.

Women who identify with gay men also show a type of incorporation of the gay male identity and characteristics; for example, when I spoke to Sofia (Appendix) about her experience of Mardi Gras she replied that, ‘… even though I’m a straight female, I was a part of that community - I wasn’t different, I wasn’t a straight female, I was a gay boy !!!’ (p. 29) Amber (Appendix) also feels like a gay man and when I asked her about her relationship with gay men, she replied, ‘my friendships with gay men are closer than those with straight men – I’m often told & quite often feel like a gay man trapped in a woman’s body!’(p. 6). Casey (Appendix) too, echoes these sentiments, ‘sometimes I have this strange feeling that I’m a gay man trapped in a female body’ (p. 14).

While not all of the women who were interviewed for this research explained their relationship with gay men in this way, their mannerisms and speech reminded me very much of many the gay men I know. When I met some of the girls, I was greeted with a hug, a cheek to cheek ‘kiss’ and a ‘Mwah’ and phrases such as ‘you go girlfriend’ and ‘whatever’ seemed to unconsciously creep into their everyday conversations. Lesley uses her hands a lot when she is trying to explain something and sometimes even speaks with a campy lisp. This incorporation of another person’s mannerisms and speech is another way of avoiding the shame of personal inadequacy. Nathanson (1992) explains that when we feel lacking in personal attributes or powers, we may adopt those of a cherished other. In addition to this mimicry of gay attributes, some of these women also admit that what cements their friendships with gay men are the interests that they share. Lorraine (Appendix) says that she finds herself dating a lot of men who eventually come out as gay because they ‘listened to the music I liked, enjoyed going to the movies, etc. I believe that I was involved in so many friendships because of our similar interests in clothing, music and clubs’ (p. 23).
What attracts Lorraine to these men is not their gender, but rather the fact that they share interests that are based in aesthetics. Lorraine identifies with people who reflect her own passions in life and she admits ‘They’re like me, but with a penis’ (p. 23). When Lorraine describes her gay friends’ only difference as the fact that they possess a penis she is effectively devaluing that which patriarchal belief values the most – the penis. Many women in this study agree that one of the reasons that they value their friendships with gay men is the fact that this relationship places more importance on the person than it does the penis.

Joanne’s relationship with a gay man began during her fiancée’s terminal illness and now they have been together for over ten years. Joanne (Appendix) says that, ‘We can complete each others sentences and know what the other thinks, he loves dressing me up and I love to be dressed up, and he does my hair and makeup when we go out and is better at it than me!!’ (p. 20)

The words that these women use to describe their relationship with gay men bring to mind those initial mirroring communications with mother and father that Kohut (1984) refers to. It seems that gay men provide not only the mirror of the admiring gaze but also idealization that parents did not adequately provide in early infancy. Sofia idealizes her gay male friends and so when she looks in her mirror, it reflects the image of herself as a gay man while Amber, Lesley and other women act as the mirror that reflects their gay friends’ characteristics while on the other hand, they see their own interests reflected in gay men. Joanne’s story might be an example of a complete merging of identity because it would seem that their ways of thinking are completely synchronized; this might also suggest mutual admiration. In any case, it could be that, for these women, gay men perform a similar function to that of the mother and father during early infancy. In some cases, the mirror represents a type a merging of identity based on sameness which can not, in reality, exist. The mirror lies because a woman will never be a gay man which means that the fag hag becomes trapped between the two worlds. Many of the women in this research agree with Kristeva’s (1982) suggestion that the fag hag is ‘the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite’ (p. 3). Amber (Appendix) explains her experience of what Sedgwick (1960) has referred to as ‘the lived experiment’ (p. 63). Amber describes that she sometimes feels,
…trapped between two worlds and never quite fitting into either – I don’t fit into the ‘married with 2.5 kids’ straight society of many people my age, but don’t entirely fit into the gay community because I’m a straight woman (p. 7).

It would seem that as a woman Amber’s problem comes from the realization that she does not satisfy patriarchal expectations and is considered outside that culture but also that she does not quite fit into gay culture because she is a heterosexual woman and this is the dilemma of the fag hag. The fag hag is not ‘woman’ yet not gay man either but while heteronormative society has no empathy for her, the fag hag finds empathy with gay men because they are both decreed political exiles by patriarchal society. While other women also comment on this dilemma, they agree that their relationship with a gay man allows them to disappear, to escape from that other mirror that reflects an image of lack, the mirror of the heterosexual gaze. The fag hag’s relationship with a gay man allows her to identify with someone who can provide the loving, admiring gaze that she might not have received from her parents and, therefore, she is able to overcome the simmering shame that prevents her from finding her own subjectivity.

Acceptance, love and loyalty

It seems that patriarchal society is full of judgment, expectation and punishments for the woman whose performance of femininity is not within normative boundaries but it is this very type of performance that is welcomed by gay men. The fag hag’s rebellion is accepted in a community where qualities of outspoken loyalty, ambiguous gender performance and search for self are recognized and understood. In Chapter One I commented that Stephen Maddison described the fag hag’s identification with gay men as one of gender dissent however, I propose that the fag hag is not only a modern day rebel against the rigid laws of heteronormativity but that she was a fag hag long before she was a political rebel. By this I am referring to the fact that many of the women in this study admit to the fact that they were fag hags before they even knew what a fag hag was and Thompson (2004) refers to this phenomenon as a form of ‘felt essentialism’ (p. 44). Like many of the women I interviewed, I identified with gay men long before I knew what a fag hag was. My very first experiences of the identity happened before I had the language to describe them, before I really even understood the gay lifestyle. Likewise, comedienne, Margaret Cho (2001) says that ‘many of us did not plan to become fag hags; we just looked around one day and
realized that was what we were’ (p. 42). One reason for this could be related to the 
scripts that Nathanson (1992) explains we store from past memory and experience.

I suggest that this ‘felt essentialism’ that Thompson (2004) refers to has something to 
do with a woman’s unconscious memories of a safe platonic relationship she 
experienced as a child. So, at times when matters regarding sexuality bring about 
shame and disgust, it could be that a woman might unconsciously seek out that safe 
non-sexual relationship she had with her brother or other young boy. Thompson 
(2004) explains that ‘fag hag identifications need to be felt as innate, natural, and pre-
conscious in order to be effective politically. Such felt essentialism is what keeps fag 
hags accountable to and rooted in the queer community, rather than politically correct 
cultural tourists’ (p. 45). Examples of these types of ‘affective relations’ (Thompson, 
2004, p. 45) can be found in the transcripts of the women in this study. As a young 
girl, Anissa (Appendix) says that she was one of the boys,

but most of all I think the most influential feature would have been my best 
friend and second primary school boyfriend from when I was ten years old, 
when he came out when we were both fourteen (p. 1).

It would seem that Anissa’s young friend was drawn to her even before he would 
have known the reality of his own sexuality. Amber (Appendix) also found herself 
romantically involved with a young boy who

later came out as gay…I had an inkling that he might have been gay or bi but 
since nothing happened while we were together I wasn’t concerned. When he 
came out to me a few months after we broke up I was quite chuffed that I was 
the first person he chose to tell – that he felt comfortable enough to tell me and 
know that I would be supportive (p. 5).

Although Amber describes her relationship with this boy as ‘romantic’ it might be 
that, at such a young age, they confused platonic love with sexual love and Anissa 
later admits this saying that she later ‘learned the difference between friendship and 
romance’ (p. 5).
Sofia (Appendix) also admits that she did not know that the two men she had deep feelings for were gay,

I never knew any gay people prior to meeting 2 of my dearest gay friends when I was around 27. At this time neither of them had come out and I had a sexual relationship with both of them (at separate times). They both appealed to me as partners and I actually fell very hard for one of them... I don’t know if there’s some sort of pheromone that fag hags produce but I seem to attract gay boys – eg: If I walk into a shop and a straight male and gay male are behind the counter I will inevitably be served by the gay boy. (p. 28).

This unconscious attraction with gay men is common amongst fag hags and when I asked Dianna (Appendix) about her experiences she joked that her friends call her a ‘fag magnet’. So it seems that, for the fag hag, the attraction between women and gay men is instinctive and is often referred to as a woman’s ‘gaydar’.

With the exception of Sofia and Casey, most of the women admitted that their relationship with gay men was ‘safe’, free from sexual innuendo and tensions that are commonly experienced in their sexual encounters. Many women who had experienced shame in their sexual relationships found it a relief to be able to relate with a man who accepted them and had no sexual expectations of them. It would seem that in these instances, women identify with men who can offer an all-embracing type of love that they lacked in their early relationship with mother and father. In return, these women affirm their loyalty to gay men and, because they straddle the boundaries between gay and straight cultures, they feel that they are able to not only help to address issues around homophobia but also offer support and comfort to their friends in times of need. The fag hag can act as mediator by taking a stand against those who discriminate against her gay friends and Anissa (Appendix) believes that, ‘you get to help quell some of the homophobia in straight men when they start calling so and so a fag’ (p. 3).

It could be considered that, because of her loyalty and outspoken views, the fag hag’s voice has the potential to wield political power within patriarchal society and one way that she achieves this is in her stoic support of her gay friends. The women in this
research all demonstrate overwhelming support and loyalty for their gay male friends and one way that they make this clear is in their refusal to accept attitudes of homophobia. Lesley (Appendix) is quite adamant when she talks about her loyalty to her gay friends when she comments, ‘through my life I have had boyfriends who have been very jealous of my gay friends but I have never tolerated homophobia from my boyfriends’ (p. 25). Sofia (Appendix) also explained that her friendship with gay men was a priority in her life and because of this she has not been able to form lasting relationships with straight men.

I truly believe that if it weren’t for my gay friends I’d be married by now with children, but due to me spending all my time with my gay friends it limits the people I meet. I also refuse to entertain the idea of a boyfriend who is homophobic, my friends come first (p. 28).

The views that these women express in regards to relationships with straight men are common amongst many of the women I have spoken to, both officially and unofficially, during the course of this research. It seems that the fag hag insists on tolerance in her relationships with straight men and if these men are unable to accept her gay friends then she refuses associate with them. In this way the bond between the woman and a gay man may be regarded as a type of familial relationship that is based on mutual love, acceptance and loyalty.

The Imaginary Father re-visited

According to Kristeva (1989) the ‘imaginary realm’ occurs during the early stage of separation from mother and during this time the child begins to incorporate or identify with the father. For a child who has suffered a narcissistic wound, the father offers a chance to complete the separation from the mother and learn to use the words that can name what it has lost. In other words, the melancholic needs to complete separation from the Thing that they mourn, and identify with someone who can provide the opportunity for language. Kristeva proposes that ‘primary identification initiates a compensation for the Thing and at the same time secures the subject to another dimension, that of imaginary adherence, reminding one of the bond of faith, which is just what disintegrates in the depressed person (pp. 13-14). It could be that in the fag hag relationship, the gay man allows a woman a second chance to access the
‘imaginary father’ that McAfee theorizes as that supportive social space that is able to provide further love and nurturance. But although McAfee suggests that this space is found in dominant culture (2004), I would argue that it can also be found within gay culture and functions to support those with similar beliefs and experiences.

One way of withdrawing from heteronormative expectation, is to escape – to disappear from the gaze of the other and for the fag hag who wants to escape from the scrutiny of the heterosexual gaze. One way for the fag hag to do this is to form an alliance with gay men. You might say that the fag hag escapes the expectations of patriarchy and seeks refuge in a place where those expectations are challenged. However, it should be noted that acts of subversion actually need patriarchy in order to rebel, and in gay culture these acts operate at many different levels creating not one, but many gay communities. For example, while some gay men prefer to blend in with heteronormative culture and act straight thereby remaining closeted, others openly flout patriarchal gender expectations and perform an unruly gender script. This diversity of identification creates sub communities within gay life and the fag hag is not usually found in some of the more subversive groups such as S and M, Leather and Bear cultures. One reason for this could be that the male performance in these cultures is based on the types of hyper masculinity and machismo that the fag hag may have previously experienced as harsh and oppressive in heterosexual men. As a result, most fag hags avoid these communities not only because they are not welcome, but also because of the high level of misogyny that is practiced within them. Therefore, it would seem that the men who feature prominently in friendships with straight women usually reside in a particular kind of gay community. According to my experience, the gay community that is the most accepting of women, and in particular, fag hags, is the one that is inhabited by young men who immerse themselves in the revelry of nightclubs and partying.

Many women are drawn towards the type of gay community where social life revolves around the nightclub and party lifestyle which might offer them support. It could be considered that the fag hag’s circle of gay friends and the space of the nightclub provide a place of trust where a woman can relax and experiment with her own versions of self and in this regard the nightclub becomes a space of play for the fag hag. The concept of play is mainly discussed in accordance with child behaviour.
but it can also be applied to the adult woman within the space of the gay nightclub. In this space a woman is free to play with different performances of self because she feels safe within a type of loving surrogate family environment. According to Donald Winnicott it is through play and playing that we are able to ‘be creative and use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self’ (1971, p. 54). But Winnicott stresses that it is not through creativity in terms of art or what we make using objects such as the paint brush, the pen or even our fantasies because these will not ‘heal the underlying lack of sense of self’ (1971, p. 54). In her social interaction with gay men, the fag hag has the chance to practice her own versions of femininity with men who will not take her literally. This gay community provides the fag hag with a safe space where she can experiment with performances of gender without the constraints and judgments of sexuality.

Since I began this research, I have met many women who profess their fag haggery with pride. These women are strong, independent and confident in who they are and their friendships with gay men are their most treasured bonds; but these women admit that they were not always so self assured. My research shows that the gay community that is centered on the nightclub culture acts as a closet for women who need to escape from the trauma of sexual relationships. The float that I organize for Mardi Gras each year has not only provided a way for people to come together and publicly show their support for gay culture. It has also brought many fag hags out of their closets. As a rule, fag hags do not socialize with each other, and rarely go out without their gay male companions not because the women who adopt this identity are scarce, but because the very nature of the fag hag is invisibility. The closet metaphor brings to mind a place to hide, to escape from some type of threat or danger and for the fag hag this danger often comes from the shame attached to issues of being seen. The closet offers invisibility, a chance of respite from the judgmental eyes of heteronormative society and during this period of withdrawal, the fag hag gradually finds her confidence, strength and pride; she becomes the subject of her own life narrative.

In a gay nightclub a straight woman becomes invisible and this longing for invisibility is connected to shame affect (Nathanson, 1992:220). In this type of gay community, a woman is no longer an object of the male gaze because here, in
the nightclub, the male gaze is directed towards men. Like a black hole, the dark room swallows the fag hag and allows her a space where she can become invisible and perform her own version of self. In some respects, the nightclub can be considered a site of play that incorporates experimentation and mimicry within a space that does not respect borders in a type of carnival atmosphere where anything goes. The hypnotic beat of dance music provides the same ritualistic involvement and feeling of freedom that was experienced by her Bacchanalian sisters and, for some; the availability of recreational drugs aids this escape. Sean Slavin (2004) believes that in the gay nightclub ‘drugs, the proximity of bodies and sexual energy within the space make it Dionysian in form’ (p. 21). The hypnotic beat of the music, the pulsing of the strobe lighting and the rhythmic dance moves create, what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1991) refers to as flow. Flow tends to result in personal growth and is achieved when a person is fully immersed and focused in an activity that creates a feeling enjoyment. According to Csikszentmihalyi flow is completely focused motivation; it is ‘the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake’ (p. 6). The constant beat of the music and rhythm of dance in the nightclub resemble the ritual of tribal dances that also produce flow thereby giving people an opportunity to break free from their oppressed or alienated lives.

R ritual and ecstasy have been used as a means of escaping oppression since Ancient Greece, when women sought the support and guidance of their goddesses as well as a safe place where they could be free from patriarchal oppression. According to Leftkowitz and Fant ‘the politically oppressed often turn to ecstasy as a temporary means of possessing the power they otherwise lack; orgiastic ritual, trances and magic provided some outlets’ (273). The gay nightclub, and also Mardi Gras, provide a place for the making of identities through rituals that bring to mind the concept of Bakhtin’s (1984) carnival. The gay nightclub provides an atmosphere that might be considered to be a scaled down version of Mardi Gras and there is a certain feeling of unity that prevails inside the nightclub. One of the reasons for this is because the nightclub can offer the same freedom from oppression and breaking down of barriers that can be found in the medieval carnival. Bakhtin (1984) explains that ‘carnival is the place for working out a new
mode of interrelationship between individuals . . . People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square’ (p.123). Carnival therefore presents a broader view of life not only because it exposes, threatens and destroys the power of our existing definitions about the world, but also because it renews and highlights everyday life. In his article, Identity Formation, Space and Social Centrality, Kevin Hetherington (1996) refers to these types of celebration and festival as ‘liminoid… [where]…identities are deliberately subversive, threatening and grotesque’ (p. 42). It is interesting to note that one of the features of carnival is the grotesque body which Kristeva relates to her concept of the monstrous feminine. Some examples of transgressive female bodies can be seen in the unruly women in Shakespearean plays, the terracotta figurines of old pregnant hags in discussions of Bakhtin and also Charcot’s photographs of female hysterics which are all representative of the ambivalent grotesque body (Jones, 2003, p. 418).

The grotesque female body, or as Kristeva (1982) calls it, the monstrous feminine belongs to the abject and because of this, Mary Russo (1985) explains that ‘images and cases of women ‘in excess’ of the idealized feminine may operate as threat (as well as example to other women)’ (p. 418). The fag hag, as well as those women already mentioned as figures of excess, crosses boundaries of normative femininity and might be regarded as a transitional figure who resides in a liminal space. According to Victor Turner (1987) liminality refers to the space between things as, ‘a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise’ (p. 5). Liminal spaces exist in-between boundaries and are places where different classes of people, different cultures and ways of being come together and represent a period of ambiguity. These spaces offer the fag hag a place where she can do things that she normally can not do anywhere else and there is no one to judge her.

As a liminal space, the gay nightclub operates around concepts of freedom, disorder, alcohol and drug taking, self-indulgence and outlandish costumes. In this way, the gay nightclub plays a large part in the lives of many women who, like their gay male friends, also use it to withdraw from heteronormative society and this transitional space becomes, for the fag hag, a place for her to complete her rite
of passage into subjectivity. There is a feeling of acceptance and love in the eternal
night of the gay nightclub which resembles Bakhtin’s notion of carnival because in
many ways it offers the same freedom from oppression and breaking down of
barriers.

Hetherington (1996) introduces the concept of liminal spaces and their importance to
identity formation and social interactions. Hetherington explains that rituals are
associated with life changes and consist of three stages. For the fag hag, the first
stage involves her separation from heteronormative culture and renouncing her
identity; the second stage requires her to exist in a liminal space ‘which is associated
with transgression…and thresholds where activities and conditions are most uncertain
and the normative structure of society is temporarily overturned (p. 36). In this
second stage the fag hag might experience some form of humiliation or be required to
undergo certain ordeals and in the final stage of her right of passage, the fag hag will,
in most cases, be reinstated into heteronormative society as a new person. This means
that once the fag hag has withdrawn into the gay community, she must then become
accustomed to certain practices which may be foreign to her and one example, for a
straight woman at least, might involve the public visibility and openness of
homosexual acts.

Another example might be the humiliation that the fag hag suffers from some gay
men and drag queens as they shame her for being a woman. Some drag queens are
particularly good at aiming their sarcastic barbs and contempt at any woman who
might be in the room. One reason for this could be that in heteronormative society,
women are regarded as inferior, ‘the weaker sex’ and one way for a gay man - who is
also seen to be effeminate by hegemonic standards - to alleviate cultural shame is for
him to render a verbal attack on the nearest woman. By verbally attacking a woman,
the drag queen is, according to affect theory, increasing his self esteem at the expense
of the woman (Nathanson, 1992). This misogyny may also be linked with
internalized homophobia and as Keith McNeal (1999) argues, can be seen to be

antagonism toward straight women as a protective displacement stemming
from the self-hate relationship of the gay man to his own stigmatized
attribution of being feminine or female… this misogyny is full of self-
loathing, born of the deep ambivalence of a culturally modeled double-bind. It is sobering and disheartening to observe attempts at assertiveness, empowerment, and transcendence through the marginal play of drag that resort to re-stigmatization and sexism (pp. 359-60).

According to McNeal (1999) one of the most common interactions between the performer and the audience is the humiliation of the straight woman by the drag queen and one of the reasons for this is the real or imagined potential for competition that exists between them for the affections of men.

The final stage of the fag hag’s rite of passage requires her to abandon her space within the gay community and re-enter heteronormative culture but I would argue that rather than a return to heteronormativity, the fag hag achieves subjectivity. Once a woman acquires a positive sense of self, she is able to make confident choices in her relationships with others. These choices are based on the same type of mutual respect that she experienced with her gay friends and she will therefore avoid those types of masculine performance that had previously oppressed her. Therefore, according to Marcia Cavell (2006) when a woman gains a positive sense of self, she is ready to become subjective, to recognize herself ‘as an “I”, as having her own peculiar perspective; a subject is an agent who is able to be self-reflective, and to assume responsibility for herself and for some of her actions’ (p. 1).

**The Fag Hag in Heterotopia**

In a heteronormative society, the gay nightclub can also be regarded as, what Michel Foucault (1986) describes as an Other space. Foucault explains that we do not live in a void, but rather ‘inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another’ (p. 23). Our lives are entrenched in a set of relations and, as an example, he describes sites of ‘temporary relaxation [such as] cafes, cinemas, beaches’ (p. 24). In other words, we would not work on a beach or in the cinema because these spaces are designated as sites where we can relax. In contrast, Other spaces are places of difference that contradict all other sites. Foucault referred to these spaces as ‘heterotopias’ which are a collection of unusual things that are given meaning
through the production of a symbolic space that offers an alternate model for social order. Foucault describes heterotopias as spaces which ‘are outside of all places…different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about’ (p. 24).

While Foucault explains that heterotopias are many and varied in form he classifies them into two categories, crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. While the first category relates to ‘privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are…in a state of crisis’ (p. 24) Foucault reserves the second category for ‘individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm’ (p. 24). However these two categories may intersect so it could be that the gay community is a type of crisis heterotopia for the fag hag because she is, indeed, suffering a crisis of identity. However, the gay community can also be regarded as a type of deviant heterotopia because the fag hag’s performance of femininity is outside the expected norms in as much as homosexuality is regarded as a deviant form of masculine performance.

In view of this it could be that the fag hag and her gay male friend have a heterotopian relationship which unsettles heteronormativity and as a result they create other forms of identity. In his article, ‘Identity formation, space and social centrality’, Kevin Hetherington, (1996) explains that these relationships ‘facilitate the ordering of a new identity or identities. Margins become centres, centres become margins and the meaning of centres and margins becomes blurred.’ (p. 39). These heterotopian sites are associated with outsider cultures and transgressions and as such they offer ‘alternate social ordering, an ordering that has important implications for the issue of identity formation’ (p. 39). Therefore you could say that a woman’s relationship with a gay man and the gay party and nightclub culture provides the basis for a new identity for the woman which blurs the boundaries between gay and straight and paves the way for a new social order that is not based on sexual preference. In this respect, the fag hag can initiate new ways of identification that does not rely on sexual orientation as a defining feature.
CONCLUSION

As a result of this research I am now in a position to bring to light some things about the fag hag that, to my knowledge, have not been addressed in earlier studies. Firstly, and most importantly, I find that the bond between the fag hag and a gay man is one that so closely resembles the relationship between a brother and sister that it could almost be regarded as a sibling relationship. This bond displaces the parental bond and provides a second chance for a woman to experiment with versions of her self that will ultimately lead to subjectivity. Secondly, the fag hag is in a unique position to ultimately promote understanding between heterosexual and gay culture. This is possible because fag hags blur boundaries, cross borders and dwell somewhere in between and therefore they are able to highlight the inconsistencies and problems that arise from identities that are based on gender. As a result of this resistance to be contained within the boundaries of categorization the fag hag creates new opportunities for on-going discussions around an alternative politics of gender relations. This means that the voice of the fag hag, which has previously been silenced and ignored, will now be heard alongside other queer identities, where I firmly believe that she belongs.

According to my research the fag hag identity raises the question of whether our sexual orientation is necessarily as important as a defining feature of our identity as has previously been thought. What defines the fag hag is not whether she is a straight woman, a lesbian or bi sexual, but rather her strong alliance with people who do not objectify her and accept her unconditionally. I believe that the fag hag is in a unique position from which a woman can show others that not all relationships between men and women need to have a sexual basis and that this bond can lead to the enrichment of a woman’s self esteem and agency. It is my hope that this study has the potential to speak to women who have not yet become the subject of their own life narrative and show them that there is a way to be whoever they want to be and in the process, learn to love themselves from within.
APPENDIX
APPENDIX

“Anissa”

Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

In terms of being a “fag hag” I could relate the fact that my brother and his friends gave me a pretty hard time when I was on the cusp of adolescence. By no means abusive, I think some of his obnoxiously straight-male friends showed me a very unattractive side to men and related to me not as a young girl but an extension of my brother (who they could tease, treat roughly and also get to my brother by being hurtful to me.)

At the same time there was still a very strong sense of protectiveness from my brother and his friends as they would caution me from getting involved with boys because they were likely to use me. I saw the honesty in them and they did not feel like they needed to be “gentlemen” around me as I was kind of like one of the boys. I saw this as a blessing however and an insight into the hormone driven motives of young teenage boys.

But most of all I think the most influential feature would have been my best friend and second primary school boyfriend from when I was ten years old, when he came out when we were both fourteen. For me I had such a strong friendship and connection with him but as he entered adolescence I could sense the struggle he was having with himself and his place in the world. It was as if my friend was trying to be someone he wasn’t and was trying to project this false image of normalcy for himself.

It wasn’t until he came out (and I later accepted it) that we regained our true friendship. I think being there for him during this time and for the past thirteen years now, I have seen the struggles he has been through and also the great things he has experienced as a gay man. Without this friendship my mind could possibly have had a much narrower perspective on what being gay was, at a young age. At the time when he came out many of my brothers friends and other school friends had not
spoken positively of being “gay.” My father also had told me maybe [my best friend] was just a SNAG.

I also remember before my friend came out going to see a psychic with him at about 11 or 12 years old. He asked about his soul mate and the medium (in her channelled state) addressed my friend as a “she.” From this moment I guess like many people, I just viewed my best friend as being predominantly feminine, as I see some of my lesbian friends as predominantly masculine.

Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

None to my knowledge

Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?

My relationships with gay men are much more trusting than those I have with straight men; I have a level of emotional intimacy with them that I would not find with a straight man or even a straight woman. There is a special sense of uniqueness. I feel like a renegade at times for the way I think when I am around them. I guess this stems from not needing to fit the “straight” mould. But at the same time there is a very strong need to fit the “gay mould” of elegance and opulence or tragically extravagant but it is all done in good humour and good faith.

There is also the feeling of exclusivity with my gay friends; I have two who I would call the first and second gay loves of my life. We can be forthright and there is never any judgment that what I’m saying is inappropriate or unnecessary (or in the case that it is, they tell me). But the exclusivity does not extend to a sexual relationship so we relish in “gossipy girl talk” that surrounds new loves. I think there is always a strong sense of being your personal best in a relationship with gay men (or at least the ones I know).

If there is something lacking in my life, like I need to see a movie and switch off or go out and dance or even have my house cleaned because I’ve been too busy or sick they will do it for me but out of the goodness of their hearts not like in straight
relationships where there is a sense of obligation. It’s also like what they offer you are what you really need and desire because they idealise very similar things, like success, confidence, clean house, great style & wardrobe etc.

I also feel that with one new gay friendship I have come to help him to become open about his sexuality. Without physical intimacy the issue of sex and sexuality is always in the open, easily discussed and in a way this is empowering. On the negative side I feel less feminine and beautiful at times due to the sometimes critical nature and controlling (i.e. In dressing) behaviour, also straight male relationships provide a more grounded and earthy perspective on life sometimes.

In some ways I admire some gay men’s ability to accumulate wealth but at the same time holding great worth for unattainable designer goods (to me) seems unnecessary. Perhaps this is because for me to achieve the “straight” goal of having a family and house etc. I need to think rationally and practically when budgeting but to be in a DINK relationship (double-income-no-kids) there is an element of life that my frivolous and pragmatic ways don’t mix well with.

Perhaps there is a strong hint of the jealousy I feel for not being able to live this life, but also a hint of sadness for the fact that its likely many of these gay men may not be fathers (although they will make fantastic “fairy” godfathers).

**What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?**

Despite the insanely negative stereotypes about fag hags I think there are many positive aspects. There is a boost in self esteem from knowing that there is someone who loves you and allows you to be your unique self without the strings attached or drama of a sexual relationship. You get to help quell some of the homophobia in straight men when they start calling so and so a “fag.” There’s always a sperm donor for me further along the track if I find myself single and longing for a child.

It’s also great that it’s a relatively new (positive) concept like a secret little club. And by being a fag hag you can spend all the time you want with a gorgeous man without your partner getting jealous.
What do you see as negative aspects of the fag hag identity?

Sometimes, at least for a period in my life I didn’t put myself out there enough for a straight partner because I saw myself already partnered in a sex-less relationship. At the time it was what I needed but perhaps I had missed a window from this. Also I was influenced by the way gay men view straight men; in particular the qualities they dislike in macho sloppy men…well much of Australian male society. From taking this on board too I think I was overtly critical and judgemental of many straight men. Also it’s come up in the song ‘Stella’ by Jamie T that getting “fag hagged” is used by some young straight blokes who try with a girl and “fail” by having a fag/hag relationship in which they are less masculine and sexually inadequate. Whether this becomes a catchphrase I’m not sure!

Mardi Gras

I couldn't make it, so I guess perhaps I'm not qualified to answer this question. Doh! But from what we saw on our way to George St (my boyfriend confused it with Oxford St.) we saw a lot of straight girls having a great time. I think to them there was a sense of safety at Mardi Gras (less likely to be harassed) therefore they were pretty outrageous and embracing their campy hag persona's. The wildest people I saw all night were mostly the straight women. For many I'm sure it was the ultimate girls’ night out i.e. very reminiscent of a hen’s night.

But also more seriously for me (perhaps too paranoid) but I had a bad feeling for my gay best friend who walked to my house (inner city) by himself at dusk. He was taunted by groups of straight guys. I was cautious (because we were away from the parade) that he might be targeted by homophobic people. But all in all it was a good night.

Describe yourself in five words

Intelligent, open minded, loyal, non judgmental, confident
“Amber”

Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

I was a bit of a tomboy - growing up I always had male friends and often felt more comfortable with boys than girls. My parents taught me to be self-reliant and to value intelligence and talent rather than appearance, which as I grew older often put me at odds with female friends but bonded me with men. Attending a single-sex high school meant I felt like an outsider much of the time and had little time for all the petty competition between many of the girls, so when I reached university I gravitated towards male friends.

My parents also taught me to think about something from the other person’s point of view – strong opinions can only be formed when you know both sides of a story. I was friends with a lot of people during my childhood and teen years that had a variety of different backgrounds (often considered outsiders) and this sometimes led to clashes between myself and kids who fit the teenage ‘norm’, mostly in defense of those they chose to pick on. I think this shaped me into a person who easily empathises with men who have gone through (and continue to go through) the pain of homophobia and ‘coming out’.

Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

Most of my significant adult relationships have been close friendships with men, be they straight or gay. Gay men have always made me feel completely comfortable in who I am, which has then given me the strength to be myself in any situation.

One ‘romantic’ relationship was with a guy who later came out as gay. This was a bit of a turning point for me - I had an inkling that he might have been gay or bi but since nothing happened while we were together I wasn’t concerned. When he came out to me a few months after we broke up I was quite chuffed that I was the first person he chose to tell – that he felt comfortable enough to tell me and know that I would be supportive.
Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?

My friendships with gay men are closer than those with straight men – I’m often told and quite often feel like a gay man trapped in a woman’s body! In addition to the connection created by having mutual interests, there is no underlying sexual attraction in the friendship so you can be more emotionally open and affectionate without fearing potential misunderstandings. Gay men (and by extension, the gay community) are often more open about themselves and more demonstrative of their emotions and feelings, which creates a special bond between fags and hags. As someone who enjoys frank discussion and hearing about other’s experiences I find gay men are often happy to share their experiences (particularly given an opportunity to brag!), to talk openly and honestly about topics that are traditionally taboo in heterosexual society. I also have a natural empathy for people who have experienced a struggle to find their identity and sense of self, so I feel unconsciously protective of men who’ve been through the ‘outing’ experience and who suffer the ongoing homophobia in society.

What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?

I see fag hags as women who are drawn to friends by a mutual love of life, interests and experiences, who often then realise they fit the fag hag identity later down the track when they realise their closest friends are gay. My realisation at being a ‘hag’ rather than just a female friend came when I found myself with a group of close friends at my first gay dance party surrounded by 15,000 gay men and realised I had never felt so comfortable and such a sense of belonging with a group of friends and strangers before.

Being a part of the gay community, a group of people who are generally more open and accepting of ‘difference’, is a very positive experience. There is a special bond between gay men and fag hags which is born from the shared experience of not fitting straight societal ‘norms’ - the emotional connection I feel to my gay friends is different to that of straight friends because I know they understand my disconnect from straight society and embrace me for who I am.
Having a label in the gay community is important - everyone fits at least one (whether or not they chose to use it themselves) and hags form an important identity in the community alongside bears, queens, twinks, etc. It’s nice to know you’re such an ingrained part of the community that they created a label for it - albeit not the most pleasant sounding one! I feel that the identity ‘fag hag’ is very much like the idea of gay men ‘reclaiming’ the terms ‘poof’ or ‘fag’ by using them affectionately between themselves…. 15 years ago I would have been horrified to be called a fag hag given the awful connotations that term had within and outside of the community. I feel hags have ‘reclaimed’ the title and now I refer to myself as fag hag with pride, knowing that other people in the community know and understand that special gay man/fag hag relationship.

As a fag hag you are not 100% in the gay bucket, but you aren’t 100% in the straight bucket either’ and believes ‘that sexuality is fluid and can take whatever shape the person wants - as a hag I actually feel more like a gay man in a woman's body than a straight woman. Interestingly, in the recent social shift towards ‘gay’ being cool I often hear straight women refer to themselves as ‘fag hags’ in an effort to be trendy, something they would never have thought to label themselves years ago. This is often to the consternation of real hags like myself!

**What do you see as negative aspects of the fag hag identity?**

For me, the negative aspects of the fag hag identity stem from its very nature – being a woman in a male dominated world. This duality sometimes leads to a feeling of being trapped between two worlds and never quite fitting into either – I don’t fit into the ‘married with 2.5 kids’ straight society of many people my age, but don’t entirely fit into the gay community because I’m a straight woman.

In an environment where it’s constantly men talking about men (and men talking about themselves!) you can also tend to lose your sense of yourself as a woman. There are moments when innocuous comments (sometimes derogatory but usually joking) made about women and the female body/persona really hit home and remind you that you aren’t just ‘one of the guys’. I feel like sometimes my own sexuality takes a back seat.
Being a fag hag my lifestyle is so intertwined with the gay community that I know about all the wonderful things the community and the ‘scene’ has to offer and most of the time being ‘just one of the gays’ I join them. However every so often I’m excluded from an event based purely on my gender. While I obviously understand why there are men-only events it can be difficult as a independently-minded woman to hear “it was fabulous, it’s such a shame you couldn’t go” purely because of my gender, particularly when the only woman-only events are for lesbians and hold no interest for me.

**Describe yourself in five words**

Intelligent, opinionated, loyal, protective, straight talking (no fluff)
COOKIE CUP CAPERS

Sunday night is a great party night for me, I like to ward off the blues, perhaps have a bit of a dance and forget that Monday is just hours away. Old Spice, on the other hand, is generally grumpy and likes to clip his toenails, polish his shoes and finish reading the travel bits of the newspaper. Sunday night has, therefore, become the night I hang with the homos. (It also keeps our marriage good and strong if Old Spice is not subjected to the sight of me dancing).

Last night, my Designated Driver took me – in a smart, new mustard frock – off to see the drag cabaret show, The Cookie Cups, at Tanza Night in Fourways. It was jaw-droppingly good, a very sophisticated show. I was lucky to have the two most handsome young men in Johannesburg at my table and – given my fabulous lunch – didn’t order food, although I did taste their pizzas, which were very good.

It seems that the dance-floor has we knew it has disappeared: we now have catwalks or ramps, or as was the case last night; the modular cubed business – shaped into a T with the dancing part of it about a mere meter squared. This is all very well for the gay people, because their version of dancing is to stand quite still, pose and occasionally, to wiggle their hips. For older straight women, who have had a rather a lot of Merlot and who want to be a bit more adventurous and do, say, the Frug or the Watoosie, it becomes dangerous and you forget about the little T-shape and, well, you fall off. Quite hard. At a straight party this would cause gossip and get you struck from the party list for good, but the fags take it all in their stride, pick you up, dust you off with a big hug and the whole thing is never mentioned again.

I have a little headache this morning and a swollen knee, so I’m going to take it easy and just fiddle in my garden.

I was genetically predisposed to being the Fag Hag I am. My mother, an incredibly glamorous hairdresser in the 1960’s Bloemfontein, was a Fag Magnet of note. In an
era when homosexuality was a criminal offence, our home was a safe haven for parties few people ever forgot. I grew up with many, many uncles. There were my mom’s fellow hairdressers, fondly known as Bennie en Hennie (smoking was de rigueur back then). Bennie could always be relied on to dance with a lampshade on his head, or wear the flokati rug as a shawl while he sang Cole Porter classics.

Then there was Uncle Arch. Uncle Arch stayed at the same seaside hotel as us every December in Margate. Uncle Arch was a ‘bachelor’ and never wore shorts to the dining room, even if it was only going to be a buffet. Uncle Arch taught my sister and I that it’s not worth having a martini if there weren’t any olives and that we shouldn’t ever bother with chaps who wore socks a shade lighter than their trousers. Uncle Arch could take a 5 cent piece from behind my ear and let me keep it to buy a bead necklace at the beach. People marveled that such a handsome and erudite man had never married. Gossip had it that there had been a romantic disappointment. My mom and Uncle Arch sipped Gin Slings by the poolside and wondered what possessed that woman to think she should show the world the back of her legs, or why that pathetic man woke up this morning and thought it a quite good idea to wear satin jogging shorts in public.

My grandparents had the ultimate marriage-of-convenience. They had separate bedrooms from day one; they took sea cruises as often as they could. They adored one another in a sedate and very civilized manner. He was in charge of the drapery department at John Orrs and their home had baroque pieces of fabric hanging all over the place, even where there were no windows. He knew Evelyn Waugh in his youth. By some unspoken, impeccable code of conduct, he was probably what I think of as a ‘navy moffie’;” only when on board, if it’s good for morale”!

Growing up, I somehow always ended up partnering the ‘artistic guy’ to the school dances. It was just more fun to plan my outfit with someone who appreciated that my long gloves were vintage, who’d suggest we do the whole retro-Charleston thing properly or not at all, including tortoiseshell cigarette-holders.

My most enduring relationships have been Pink. I value the uncomplicated acceptance and support, I love the exuberant shopping and travel experiences, I adore the drama
and excitement of the build up to Pride every year. I’ve shared the shockingly cruel pandemic that is AIDS, I’ve mopped brows and carried chicken soup during the dreadful fight and lost too many times. I’ve done the flowers at too many funerals, but I’ve always come away enriched by the strong sense of community and support. And I always come away, somehow, with one more Gay Best Friend.

Not even my husband is brave enough to say, as my camp-as-a-row-of-tents Hairdresser friend did: “sny jou bolla, Dolla, you look a hundred in the shade”. Gotta love him.

For those of you who asked, Wikipedia has the best definition:
A fag hag is a slang term for a woman who either associates mostly or exclusively with homosexual men, or is best or good friends to a gay man or men. It originated in gay male culture in the United States and was historically an insult. Some women who associate with gay men object to being called fag hags, while others embrace the term. Men who have similar interpersonal relationships with lesbian women are called dyke tykes; furthermore people who associate with gays, lesbians, and bisexuals may be called "fruit flies" regardless of their sex.

Usage
Fag hags are frequently stereotyped as outgoing, sometimes overly beautiful women, who are seeking a substitute for heterosexual relationships, or who are secretly sexually attracted to gay men. In fact, many women who identify as fag hags are already in romantic relationships, either with straight men or with women but appreciate the alternative experience of socializing with gay men.

In interviews with gay men and self-described fag hags, the most common theme is safety. A rich relationship can develop between a straight woman and a gay man without sexual tension. The fag hag relationship allows the participants to separate intimacy and sexuality. The term fag hag can also mean a gay icon.
“Casey”

Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?
As far as I recall, we were a typical middle class American family. My father was an engineer; my mom a stay-home wife. My older sister a majorette and cheerleader; both my father and brother were athletes, one a swimmer, the other a gymnast; and from an early age I followed in their footsteps. In high school I excelled in basketball, field hockey and track. As to specific sexual events, I remember playing “doctor,” at age 6 or 7 with friends of both sexes, and then feeling somewhat guilty about it, as we’d been taught—both my parents were strict Baptists—that such behavior was sinful. I never got caught, but my parents must have suspected, or maybe one of the other kids told. Anyway, as far as I was concerned, it was no big deal. Just a normal part of growing up.

Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?
In high school, I didn’t date at all. All my spare time was spent in sports and reading. Though some of the boys who asked me out were very good-looking, hunks as they’re called nowadays, I was never attracted to any of them. They seemed too immature and silly. My first real experiences with men came later. The women’s college I attended was located near the Marine training base. Every weekend young Marine officers would descend on the college to pick up “chicks”, some for a pleasant evening of companionship, but most, 90% at least, just for a quick “lay.” One guy I stupidly agreed to go out with proceed to imbibe whiskey and paw me the minute we got into his car. I was all I could do to break free and run back to the dorm. Another one took me out to a movie, which turned out to be a hard-core porno flick. (Unbelievably boring stuff!). And so it went with the next four Marines. Finally, I said enough is enough and opted to remain weekends in the dorm chatting with girl friends. Cleary, the swaggering, macho man I had come to know from experience was not the kind of guy I was looking for.
Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?

It was as a grad student that I first met openly gay men. Some, to my dismay, were but homosexual versions of the macho Marines from Quantico. Some, in fact, were worse. Deep into SM, their promiscuity and emotional insensitivity toward one another was downright scary. Others, though, the majority, were loving, caring individuals. Their soft mannerisms and child-like qualities strongly won me over from day one. And the way they blushed, and touched and stole flirtatious glances at each other turned me on to no end. (So maybe I’m not your “fag hag” in the Platonic sense of the term.) Felipe, my husband of 25 years and father of our two grown sons, both straight, was one of those lovable gays. We had so many interests in common you’d think we were soul twins—travel, art, literature, classical music and, most important, a need to procreate. A woman couldn’t have asked for a more wonderful husband and our sons for a more caring dad. (The boys, by the way, never knew that their dad was gay, though as they grew older they may have suspected it.) As regards our sex life, needless to say, it’s not exactly conventional. Creative would be a good word to describe it, especially now that the boys are not living with us. Felipe also has a transgender bent that I find very appealing.

What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?

We Westerners tend to cram people into categories where no categories exist, or are murky at best. The positive aspects of the “fag hag” identity is that it shows that human relationships can take many forms, and that whatever form it takes, if it harms no one, it’s no more or less valid socially and morally than any other. Now it’s obvious to me (why didn’t I see it before?) that my own mom is a dyed in the wool fag hag. From what I recall, she never tried to instill a fear or hatred of men in me. She understood and accepted prototypical patriarchal men, yet she ridiculed them, treated them condescendingly, referring to them as “the weaker sex.” Of her three children—my older sister, my younger brother and myself—the one she most doted on was my brother. In high school he became a good athlete, thanks to my father’s training, but as a child he was by extremely shy, small for his age, and somewhat girlish. And I too doted on him. Our family album is full of photos of me cuddling and “mothering” him. The boy, now a head taller than Dad, and though straight, still somewhat girlish, and on his third marriage.
Then there was Mom’s attraction to Felipe: When I married Felipe she became like a second wife to him, to the point that she felt jealous of me. No two days went by that she didn’t come over to cook for him or bring him some little gift. When our sons were toddlers she was very loving with them, but as they matured and showed they would turn out to be quite straight, she became more distant. Now she seldom asks about them. But what has really brought her fag hag identity to light—now that I think about it—is her relationship with my gay nephew. My sister’s two younger children, a boy and a girl, are conventionally straight. Both now are married with kids of their own. The elder boy, though, now in his mid twenties, is openly gay, and has been so since puberty. Him my mom adores. When he was a teen, she would take him browsing through antique and jewelry shops. Later, she paid most of his way through college and financed his weekend outings with friends. Now she takes him along, all his expenses paid, on her yearly vacations to Europe. With our sons and her other grandchildren she is not nearly as generous. Aside the obligatory birthday and Christmas presents, she they birth her are token birthday and Christmas presents. And she still drops by once a week to visit with Felipe.

As to Dad, I have always enjoyed a close relationship with him, much more so than with Mom. At first Dad was a little dubious about Felipe, but now he accepts him, and he loves all his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren equally. You no doubt would find my mother an interesting subject for your project, but I would be reluctant to ask her to participate. She probably has never heard of the term “fag hag” and, at her age, 73, it might be best if she didn’t. Whether I acquired my fag hag leanings from her or from some other unrelated source, I do not hazard to speculate. As to my relationship with other women, it has been more or less typical. I have a number of women friends, most straight, some Lesbian, yet I much prefer the company of feminine men, though they may be straight or bisexual.

What do you see as negative aspects of the fag hag identity?
Sometimes I have this strange feeling that I’m a gay man trapped in a female body. I do, though, find the term “fag hag” offensive. It has a harsh, vulgar ring to it. Hopefully someone will come up with a better term for it
Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

I was very close to my father and my mother was an alcoholic – she was once a beauty queen/catwalk model. I guess they were "swingers" in the 70’s and as an the oldest child I saw a lot of parties at the house. I didn’t understand why I had so many "uncles" as a young girl – I was always surrounded by lots men as a child and didn’t have a very high opinion of my mother, yet I adored her and thought she the most beautiful person in word as most kids do. I remember even as a very young child thinking that she wasn’t a very clever woman and preferred to converse with my father. It was obvious to me she had some strange "power" over men as she seemingly bewitched all the men than passed through our home etc. Because we were quite wealthy at that time, my parents would take me out of a night to restaurants so I learned to behave as an adult at a really young age. I also learned how to entertain men with cute stories etc. My younger siblings were left at home with a nanny. I was a quite a bright child and very good as school. My father was involved in a lot of bookmaking with people in Sydney and it was mostly men that we went out with – there were always lots of men in my life.

Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

My mother became very ill when I was about 5 and my grandmother whom I adored cared for us until she died suddenly of a heart attack. We children we placed in foster care for about (6 - 12 months) and didn’t see my father much during this time. I remember this as a very significant and traumatic time where I feared I would never see my mother again. Later when my mother recovered and we returned to the family home I became close to my grandfather who lived nearby. My mother became an alcoholic soon after her recovery. I always seemed to be more close to men. My father had a lot of male friends much younger than him, as he managed a national football team and remained involved in the Sydney horse racing scene. He travelled a lot so I missed contact with my father. As a child, I was shy but I covered it by trying to be clever and funny. I would faint if I had to speak in public at school but could
hold court with the grown ups more confidently.

I was married at seventeen - the first time I had sex I got pregnant and my Catholic parents insisted I get married. Now, I have four kids two gay two straight. I met my first husband in a gay bar and cried all the way to the church. At school I was a wild child, always wanting to shock teachers and peers, and was the one who was least likely to get married and have children. I stopped dating schoolboys in yr 10 and moved to older men that I met in clubs. I endured a really horrible pregnancy and birth – I had one more child then escaped to northern New South Wales to lead a hippy lifestyle. My first son was a stressed out baby and I really didn’t want to have any more children – the thought of it horrified me but I must have had sex once during the next year and fell pregnant again. When the doctor told me that I was pregnant I was very upset and cried….I didn’t want another baby.

I pretty much have only gay friends – I really don’t like labels, not even the "fag hag" one to be honest, and have never thought of myself as gay or straight just queer…Once, I was called a fagnet. My friend told me that this was better than a fag hag more like a fag magnet. As a 40 something women my tastes have changed considerably. I am not in a relationship at the moment because I joke that I have either married or divorced every eligible person in this town!

**Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?**

At this time I find that my relationships with straight men are really friendships, but generally the gay men are just easier to talk to as there is no expectation of possible romantic encounter. They are also much more accepting of my sexual preferences. They can be whiney, self centered and a bit selfish but you can always count on your gay friends to build you up when you are down and they have a nurturing quality whereas straight men generally can’t do this. I don’t like to generalise as of course there are some sensitive straight guys out there lol!

**What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?**

I think I am generally accepted by most gay men I meet. They will usually say
something nice even though they can be a bit bitchy at times! Often they see me as a bit of a "spotter" in their on-going quest for new conquests! But on the whole, gay men will usually accept you warts and all!

**What do you see as negative aspects of the fag hag identity?**

Sometimes being a fag hag can have negative connotations because some straight men think you can’t get a man and that’s why you hang out with gays - you can’t handle a "real man". I consider these men homophobes and find their reactions to my relationships with homosexuals annoying. At work, I find that if it is discovered that I have this type of lifestyle, co-workers tend to look down their nose at me and my friends. I don’t get invited to many social functions through work as I dont fit into the mould of what is acceptable.

I guess the "traditional" fag hag is assumed to be a straight woman in need of male attention....just know its not always the case and I think the need for positive affirmations (of femininity or whatever is sought) stems from something other than the fag hag identity....

Personally, (and you already know this, now knowing me,) I hate having to identify and label myself...I mean seriously, who really needs to know who I’m sexually attracted to (at any given time)?......I do feel as time go by that I’m *required* to identify as "lesbian" which really gets under my skin. Doesn’t sit comfortably with me because I have loved men too...as sexual beings and as people. Just because I chose to mostly enjoy one thing or another (and again, whose business is it?) doesn’t mean I fit any mould.

Have given this a lot of thought of late and realise that most of my male friends are gay. I actually don’t think it has anything to do with them being gay though - does that make any sense. Maybe we become friends with similarly discriminated against people and it becomes "safe"? Do we HAVE to know heteros are opposite-sex-attracted? Of course not, Is assumed = *normal* one thing I really don’t like is the term "bisexual" ....i really don’t understand that.....find it a tad insulting but that’s just me....plenty of gay men, straight men, straight girls and gay girls I know perfectly fit the shape of fag hag.
“Elsa”

I don't especially identify as a "Fag Hag"; I think it's insulting to both the men and women concerned. I met some guys who happen to be gay - that's all. I've always had three or four very close female friends (till death do us part!) and a lot of general, male friends. Until 2000, these male friends were all straight guys, with one exception.

Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?
I grew up with a single Mum and a little brother - 3 years younger. My father committed suicide when I was 6. My Mum is a survivor, and although only a poorly-paid secretary, she provided my brother and me with all the necessities and more. I left home to go to university at 18. I had a happy childhood, on the whole. My Mum and I have not resolved a lot of things; the tie is too close, I think.

Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?
I married an American when I was 22 and moved to the US. While I was working at Yale University Library, I became good friends with a Mexican colleague, who was gay. He was the first real, live gay man I'd ever met. However, I was more interested in the fact that he was Mexican - I've always wanted to visit Central and South America.
The years went by; I married again; I went to Greece to teach English. In 2000, through mutual friends, I met (gay), and then other friends of his. At the same time, a lovely gay guy, , came to teach at my school. We became friends and then all Hell broke loose! He has very many gay friends and I met a lot of them and became friends with them.

Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?
My point is that is was a matter of chance. I didn't seek out gay men; they came to me. I had forgotten about them in intervening years - too many 'straight guy' problems to
deal with! I've always been interested in gay rights, just as I'm interested in single mums etc.

I enjoy my friendships; my oldest school friend had a lesbian relationship in the 80s. I adore the gay guys; I have good men friends who are straight. I don't like classification. I have a very young lesbian friend, [redacted], who's coming to the UK for a Master's Degree (Warwick University - GERMAINE GREER!) Germaine Greer is a heroine of mine!
“Joanne”.

I met my fag just over 10 years ago, at the time I was engaged to my soul mate of 10 years and due to get married the following year. He was dating my fiancée’s brother and we clicked straight away, even though there is 11 years difference between us (he’s younger, I am older), from that moment we were best friends and I had an instant Wedding Planner!! :) Sadlly my fiancée passed away before we could marry (he had cystic fibrosis) and I was devastated. The one person who stuck by me was my fag, without him I would not have kept my sanity. For the past ten years we have both had our ups and downs but mostly had a lot of fun together. We’ve been to Mardi Gras, we love drinking and dancing, holidaying together and especially checking out hot guys! I now know more about gays than I do about straights!! We can complete each others sentences and know what the other thinks, he loves dressing me up and I love to be dressed up, and he does my hair and makeup when we go out and is better at it than me!! I am the luckiest girl in the world to have such an amazing friend and to be part of the gay community as they are all the most special people you could ever meet and I love to socialize with them. Gays are beautiful and are sent to us from heaven I am sure.
Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

I have always found that the term ‘fag hag’ denoted a negative stereotype where I lived. I grew up in the SE United States and also on a small farming island in Canada, where anyone who was homosexual was considered ‘wrong’ and called names. We didn’t have any physical gay-bashing or hate crimes, but God forbid a guy was effeminate in my school! Similarly, a ‘fag hag’ was characterized as being an overweight, bespectacled, socially-retarded, pimply-faced girl with EXTREMELY low self-esteem who could only get male attention from gay guys. There was also the negative connotation that she was in love (romantically and physically) with those males. Personally, I was never overweight, pimply, and always had tons of boyfriends.

I noticed that I was dating guys who were ‘turning out to be gay’ in high school. I believe they were in the closet because they couldn’t come out in our community. There was never sex (or much of it really), but I enjoyed the way that they looked after themselves, accepted my shopping habits, and didn’t do all the ‘stupid’ normal male teenage crap. They held doors open for me, listened to the music I liked, enjoyed going to the movies, etc. I had a best friend since grade 6 that was always called ‘fag’ and there were rumors that he was gay. I NEVER saw that! I defended him vigorously...he was dating my female friend. When we went away to college, he came out of the closet. I was shocked, and I guess a little hurt. He always made it out that he’d had a crush on me, and admitted to having romantic feelings for me. Now that I am older, I understand the difference between romantic and physical love.

Once I accepted my best friend’s coming out, I was able to see the difference between straight and gay males. I had my ‘main gay’, and then I had my ‘gay circle’. I believe that I was involved in so many friendships because of our similar interests in clothing, music and clubs. I was not the only straight girl hanging out with a gaggle of gay guys, but oftentimes I was the only female that my gay guy friends would spend time with.
Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

The downside was that approximately 6 or 7 guys that I dated either decided they were gay or bisexual. I graduated from high school in 1990, and at that time in the States there was a big ‘bisexual movement’. It suddenly became accepted and ‘cool’ for college students (even guys) to identify with feeling sexual toward both genders. I would say that this affected me most during 1991-92. Due to HIV/AIDS, I made it a solid choice not to date any males that were bisexual. I also found that most of my completely gay male friends shunned those guys that claimed to be ‘bi’. My favourite line was, ‘You don’t get to make a choice, bitch! - *I* didn’t!’ I do not feel that I was sexually drawn toward men who were gay or bisexual, but due to the crowd that I hung with the likelihood of my dating someone who struggled with his sexual orientation was higher. I actually walked in on an ex-boyfriend performing oral sex on a guy! That was a little shocking – the good news was that we’d broken up about a year before. I also dated a guy who was known for being a womanizer all throughout high school. We dated for two months, and I was shocked at how slow our relationship was moving physically…after all, his reputation was that he’d gone through most of the cheerleaders! One day, he held me gently to him and said ‘Lorraine, I’m in another relationship and I cannot be with you.’ Of course, I said, ‘Who is SHE????’ He replied, ‘Well, his name is Tim, and he’s a pilot.’ I though at that point I couldn’t sink any lower. The biggest playboy and womanizer in town had just dumped me for a pilot named Tim.

I moved away and went to college, and immediately found four best gay-guy friends. We were very close and went clubbing, etc. No romantic involvement or confusion. I changed schools and went to another college, where I also immediately ‘found’ two gay best friends. One decided he wanted to have a sexual relationship with me (no dating, just physical), and I was adamantly opposed. He was proposing sex without even trying to kiss me first! We broke off our friendship. My gay guy friends have moved in and out of my life, depending on what is going on but my best friend, [name witheld] has remained my constant. He has been living with HIV/AIDS since 1991.
Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?

Right now I have [redacted] and about three other gay guys that I am very close with. I’ve found now that I’m married and a mother, I have more girlfriends, but my gay guy friends actually have remained more constant than my female friends. I’m not a ‘girl’s girl’. I am very feminine, very sexual, very blunt, honest, open, and I ‘tell it like it is’. I cannot stand being around women that are not like myself. My husband laughs at this, but he says I’m more at home with a group of guys at a strip club than he is (I’m actually invited to a lot of bachelor parties”). I strongly feel that since I do not get along with women because they are usually threatened by my strong sense of self, my gay male friends have always ‘replaced’ my female friends. I have almost as much in common with gay males as I do with females. We like boys and gossip and clothes and shopping and good music. I’ve had female friends sleep with my boyfriends, but my gay male friends would never do that (they might SAY they would, but I’ve never had that happen in all my years of dating – not even close!) I feel safe and validated with them. They’re like me, but with a penis.

I have a few lesbian friends, but only one that I speak with regularly. She was introduced to me via one of my best gay male friends who passed away in 2002. Other than her, I don’t communicate with, hang out with, or have any lesbian friends. That’s not a conscious choice as I have no problem with lesbianism. I have considered myself bi-curious in the past and have made out with other women and done some ‘fondling’ but my husband is not interested in my pursuing anything further so that is off-limits for us as a couple. It is not something I really would consider anyway because I truly feel 98% straight and 2% bi-CURIOUS, not bisexual.

What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?

So, there you have it. I’ve probably left a lot out because my history is very long with my gays. I love them. They’ve helped me through the roughest situations in my life, situations in which my female friends have bailed on me. I don’t speak to any of my 3 bridesmaids, nor do I speak to my daughter’s godmother. But I still have my gays. 😊
Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

I had a catholic upbringing that was very structured. I went to church on Sundays. My mother was very independent in her thinking and accepted all of my friends. I had a good upbringing. My dad was in the navy and he was a petty officer and served in Vietnam war and was away for about seven months a year throughout my whole childhood until my parents separated. We lived in the Western suburbs of Sydney my parents did divorce eventually because my father developed Huntington’s Disease which is a disease of the brain with multiple personalities. After the divorce my mother lost a lot of friends because the Catholic Church frowns on divorce but she allowed us a lot of freedom. I used to go out lots and I had lots of good friends and we used to go partying in town. My best friend was a sign writer who lived around the corner and we used to go to Sydney and party in oxford street We were friends for years. He would dress up. He had three brothers – two were camp and the others were straight. The two camp boys were trannies. I was partying full on from the age of 14 to 25 just hitting oxford street because there was no pressure on you no one was hitting on you. All my friends wanted me to take them to oxford street for their hens nights cause I knew the nightclubs. We went to Patches, The Exchange, the Taxi Club through all of its different renovations I went out with a security guard who used to let me and my girlfriends in the door. It was all in Oxford Street. All around Surry Hills and Oxford Street and even if we went to a straight nightclub we would get bored and have to leave. We were there to dance not to pick up. What’s great about my friends going out was that they never used to rush me. A trannie friend would always be late and I used to have to hurry them up. My step brother was camp but we never let his dad know. When he was diagnosed with AIDS we kept it quiet. When we went to visit him in hospital, his friends would always be there too and Mum used to ask questions like ‘why has that woman got such a deep voice?’ and I would say ‘Mum don’t worry about it, don’t go there’ and she would ask ‘what’s a transsexual, how come that man has boobs and his voice is so high?’ I used to say ‘I’ll explain it one day’. She was pretty cool about it all really. I have had a lot of camp friends throughout my life and I have found them really fun, what’s that word? Extroverted…I have had a good time and when I was younger I had a bit of a bad
experience and I found that probably when my parents separated my father went to WA I had a few issues and I thought men are selfish and they are high maintenance so I would rather be in control and do my own thing and I found with gay men there was no big let down compared to straight men.

**Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?**

Through my life I have had boyfriends who have been very jealous of my gay friends but I have never tolerated homophobia from my boyfriends. I have celebrated the Mardi Gras over the years and I have been to a lot of shows but this year I actually participated in the parade and loved the feeling of carnival. And we are all equal aren’t we?

**Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?**

I find that you can talk to a gay man about everything and anything without being totally judged. I always wonder when a straight man asks me out I know that we are just friends but I can’t be sure that after a few drinks he isn’t going to hit on me but with a gay man you party all night long, you can sleep in his bed you can laugh til you pee your pants and its not a big issue You are accepted no matter what. There are no great expectations – that’s what I love about gay men and I find that they are a little bit more in touch with their feminine side even if they are a macho gay man and there aren’t as many pressures as what straight men can put across. They aren’t judgmental. If you are a guy and show homophobic tendencies I won’t go out with you.

**What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?**

I have been the ‘date’ for a lot of gay boys and a cover for them around their parents. A lot of men don’t listen to what I say – they think I don’t know what I am talking about but my gay friends always listen. Gay men give more emotional support and they are good to their mothers and that is really important. When your gay friends get a partner they know that you will accept them and still include them in your life where some straight friends will be friends with a gay man until he meets a partner then his
homosexuality is publicly visible. I am proud to be a fag hag because there are times when I can be supportive of my friends.

What do you see as negative aspects of the fag hag identity?
The stereotyping of fag hags is a very negative part of the identity. People think that you are a closet lesbian or bisexual because you hang out with gay men, that’s what a straight bloke would say, or she doesn’t know whether she’s straight, gay or whatever but that is their issue and I think that people have to label everyone. I have had to deal with homophobia from straight friends eg. one of my camp friends and I went to visit another girlfriend from work When we got to her house she came running out saying ‘oh, you can’t come in now to [my camp friend] because my boyfriend is coming over this afternoon and if he knows you were here he will have to disinfect the toilet and wipe everything down’. Another time three camp friends and I were at a gay resort when one of my friend’s sister came to stay with her husband who was a little bit homophobic but he accepted that his brother-in-law was gay. That night the straight guy got really drunk and moved all the outside furniture down the road but I know he wouldn’t have done that if it was a straight resort. I got on really well with the owners of this resort and I was trying to counsel the poor bloke who owned the resort because he was so upset. I am quite defensive about the negative attitudes – like she’s put on a bit of weight and not attractive so she hangs out with fags.

-------------------------------------------------------------
When I was 5 til about 11 til I got my periods (I matured a lot earlier than other girls) I was sexually abused on and off by a family friend and it affected me a lot – I didn’t realise how much until later but I had a lot of hang ups. I didn’t like people looking at me, I didn’t trust men – I didn’t allow myself to get sexually involved with anyone until I was about 17 or 18 a long time after I started going out with my gay friends. It affected me until I learnt that everything happens for a reason and that it happened at a time when I was vulnerable but I came to realise at a very young age that straight men aren’t very trustworthy and I found that the camp men that I hung out with were. Straight men have double standards – they can look at you and say one thing but mean another. My distrust of men seems to always get in the way of my relationships with them and because of this I am still single, unable to commit to a lasting relationship.
Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

My parents were big drinkers and my early teenage years were mostly spent looking after my older brother and mother (after she’d been beaten by my dad). This translates to me now as most of my relationships only succeed if I’m able to ‘look after’ and ‘mother’ my friends/boyfriends. I only feel useful in a relationship if I’m able to be the fixer. It also reflects my career choices, as the most successful roles I’ve had have been Personal Assistant or Office Manager where I’m the ‘go to’ person for the organisation.

Describe significant adult relationships with men. Are there any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

At the age of 25 I was engaged. He was actually my first ‘real’ boyfriend – all relationships with straight males prior to this were totally physical. My fiancé was someone I’d known for 4 years as a friend and in that time he’d never had a girlfriend, and rarely even ‘picked up’ when he was out. I trusted him that he wasn’t a womaniser and thought that we were both similar with regard to previous relationships etc. We were living together; the afternoon I got home from wedding dress shopping he told me he was starting to freak out about our upcoming wedding and wanted some time to think. He walked out the door and I never saw him again. He was in fact cheating on me the whole time with someone he worked with. The last I heard they were married and about to have their second child. I believe that this, as well as my promiscuous lifestyle in my late teens and early twenties, has been instrumental in my reluctance to commit to another relationship.

I haven’t had a ‘real’ boyfriend since. I’ve had relationships with straight men, some long term, but as soon as they feel like they’re becoming more than someone relying on me I sabotage it and it’s over.
Describe your relationships with gay men. In what ways do they differ from those you have experienced with straight men?

The strongest and most intense relationships I have are with gay men. Of my circle of 7 very close friends, 3 of these are gay males. Of all of my friends, acquaintances, party friends, work mates and everyone else in my life approx 75% are gay.

I seem to trust gay men more than I trust females, and certainly more than straight males (whom I don’t trust at all). I sometimes wonder what the connection is but I do think it comes down to the trust and the fact that there are no ulterior motives behind the relationship. Gay men always provide a drama of some sort so that obviously appeals to my nurturing nature as I love to get involved in their drama’s (whether they lost their favourite t-shirt or are having a major life crisis). I never knew any gay people prior to meeting 2 of my dearest gay friends when I was around 27. At this time neither of them had come out and I had a sexual relationship with both of them (at separate times). They both appealed to me as partners and I actually fell very hard for one of them. Many years later I found out that they were both falling for each other during this time and had been having an affair behind my back. This news came after I fell pregnant to one. After he proposed marriage to me and we discussed our future (remembering he hadn’t come out at this stage) we decided to terminate the pregnancy. It still amazes me to this day that he was prepared to marry me knowing that he was gay and would be hiding the truth for the rest of his life. That baby would be 15 years old now!! These two boys still hold a massive place in my heart and one is still my best friend – always will be. I think it was so much easier for me to deal with the cheating because they were both boys – if they’d cheated on me with another woman I would never have spoken to them again. I truly believe that if it weren’t for my gay friends I’d be married by now with children, but due to me spending all my time with my gay friends it limits the people I meet. I also refuse to entertain the idea of a boyfriend who is homophobic, my friends come first. I don’t know if there’s some sort of pheromone that fag hags produce but I seem to attract gay boys – eg: If I walk into a shop and a straight male and gay male are behind the counter I will inevitably be served by the gay boy.

What do you see as positive aspects of the fag hag identity?
I feel that fag hags are perceived as open minded and caring. They are also considered to be markedly different to other women, which I think is a good attribute to have.

**What do you mean by ‘different’?**
We are loud, we tell it like it is and we can hold our own with straight men. We don’t sit back and take the crap that other women seem to absorb. I like to think that straight men are a little afraid of me!

**What do you see as negative aspects of the fag hag identity?**
The name, and the perception that fag hags hang with gay boys because they can’t get boyfriends.

**MY EXPERIENCES AND IMPRESSIONS OF MARDI GRAS**
I have been to many Mardi Gras after-parties from 1999 through to 2005. I also helped to organise, and participated in, the Oz Fag Hag Float in the 2008 Mardi Gras Parade.

Going to a party with close to 20,000 gay boys is surprisingly somewhere where for once in my life, I felt accepted and that I belong. It is the most incredible experience to feel that, even though I’m a straight female, I was a part of that community - I wasn’t different, I wasn’t a straight female, I was a gay boy !!!

Being involved in the float in 2008 made me realise that there are so many women out there who have been, are going through, and understand what it’s like to be a fag hag. I thought I was the only one, but the fag hag identity is alive and well, in many shapes and forms, and for many different reasons.

**Can you describe your relationship with your mother?**
Love/hate!
“Billie”

Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?
I’m 26 years old and I am going through a “quarter life crisis”. So I guess right now I am trying to evaluate my life and my future. I am the only female in my market to have a Mix show on the radio at the 5pm high traffic hour. So basically that leads me to the fact that I work in a male dominated field as far as djing in clubs and now radio. The funny thing is that it was a hobby. I was a make-up artist by trade for MAC. That is how I tapped into the world of the “hag”. My work is competitive and every case study that a sociologist or feminist would study about women in a male work place I have experienced. And I intend to continue to be strong and firm while wearing my lip gloss. My best friend and I have been friends for 6 years. We met in college while I worked in make-up. I didn’t have a relationship with my parents (my mother was relatively moving on in her “new life” and I didn’t know my father well until 2 years before he passed). So every major event post 21 was with my gay bestie. From my estranged father’s death to loosing everything in Katrina and starting my life over after a disaster. (THAT IS A REAL ADVENTURE)…..

My relationship with my mother.
I remember my mother being very beautiful. Beautiful brown skin with big brown eyes, a shapely slim frame and long “Farrah Fawcette” hair. I never really knew my father to well, he was gone by the time I began to realize that he was never coming back. Ultimately as a young girl I adored my mother. She was the epitome of femininity. She changed her nail polish every night to match her clothes for work. Men would stop us to talk to her if we went to the store or the bank. She loved to dance and I think she was responsible for my love for music. We were very poor and she struggled terribly. She was divorced from my father and he was literally a ghost that I heard about but never saw. My mother told me something that I never forgot. “Life is going to get better as soon as I meet someone to marry me, then we won’t
struggle.” However, her plan never came into fruition. She married Raymond. I
HATED RAYMOND. I thought I was going to gain a father but he hated me. He
treated me like I was a burden. I wasn’t allowed in the living room when he was
home, they would buy food and I would have to eat leftovers. He would ignore me
when I talked, and he blamed me for everything that went wrong. Instead of my
mother standing up for me I saw another woman emerge. She started to have his
attitude. He constantly, and blatantly cheated on her and he told her he would come
home if I wasn’t there. She told me that I was ruining her marriage. There are more
gruesome stories but I have blanked them out of my memory.

The Irony in all these allegations was that I flourished in highschool. I had mediocre
grades but I was Vice President of my senior class. “Miss Junior” in the Homecoming
court. My teachers loved me and I was quite popular with the student body. I was
voted most “Talented” in my class. I was a virgin in highschool who only cared about
football game and having the latest hairstyle and I always kept a job to help pay bills.
MY MOTHER GREW TO HATE ME. She never came to my Senior activities and
she was late to my graduation. I applied to a school in Dallas for fashion design and
she sent the paperwork for financial aid blank…I began to hate her as well. I hated
that she was so weak, she thought with a simple thought process, and she dedicated
her life to a man that was a disgusting waste of a human. Then she got pregnant for
him with the false delusional thought that he would changed and he didn’t. One day I
got fed up after one of his comments and punched Raymond in the face. They called
the police on me. After she ruined my opportunity for Art school she kicked me out
the house and called a man to come get me that I never even knew……my father.
My father was a huge disappointment to me at that time. He put all my stuff in black
trash bags (which I still cant use today). I moved into a 1 bedroom apartment with
him and my paternal grandmother. After the initial anger I would smoke weed with
him by this time I had been smoking since I was 15. My father and I would talk and I
would ask him what went wrong?

To sum it up for you, he was a hustler who had so much money and got caught up
with the feds. When he was young his step-father abused him. So he gains love from
women who worship men with money. He met Naïve Ingrid (my mother) and she was
beautiful. She only aspired to be a “house wife”. Mike (my father) chased the thrills
of the street life. He fathered many children in the process while chasing money and having a drug addiction. But he was a lover boy. So charming. My mother was the quiet pretty girl but nothing more.

To fast forward to now…..My father died 2 years later. I have been on my own since I was 17. (that was a journey). But I found my way without any motherly guidance. However I went to cosmetology school at 18….That put me around women that “mothered” me. Then I started working for MAC. Cosmetics is a different world with bitchy women but it prepared me for the rest of the world. My mother has apologized but she won’t admit to what she has done me… A sad case of denial. I talk to her but I know she only tries to keep in touch because I am becoming successful. Just in case I make it big. I haven’t physically seen her in 7 years. I mean she didn’t even come to see me when I was hospitalized. I would have flown in to be with my kid. She is not like that.

That is why I don’t have detachment issues. I can be in love with a guy and we can break up and I act like I never met him. Sometimes my mother doesn’t even remember my birthday.

In her defense I think that she may be mentally ill. I try to ask my grandmother but her answers are so ambiguous. I guess I will never know why she never loved me as much as she loves her son. Or maybe her hate for my father transferred to me. I don’t know

MY BROTHER

When my mother had her son Marcus I was very maternal with him. Then she kicked me out. I haven’t been in her house since 2001. So he calls for me and I always avoid talking to him. I am so ashamed of myself but I hate the fact that she takes him to all types of activities that she can’t afford but she pulled me out of a creative arts school that I auditioned for with no formal ballet training and made it in. I never forgive her for shitting on every dream I had but she adores her son. So I think that I avoid him to avoid thinking of the pain. He has huge Christmases and they wouldn’t even get me a tree after she remarried. My father had a bunch of kids some I know and some I don’t. My oldest sister from his first marriage I knew all my life from my grandmother therefore we communicate through facebook. But she is quite brilliant and I enjoy her when she comes into town.
My girlfriends think that we [best gay friend and me] are “extreme”. .. The little family I have think that I put him before anyone. I can’t stay in a relationship to save my life. I spend my days at work waiting for “HAPPY” HAPPY HOUR on Fridays with a bunch of other hags. We created our own world and we truly believe that the reality of life is based on our theories. We both were poor college students who dreamed big and they laughed at us, and now some of the things that we dreamed are coming into fruition. The show that you heard hasn’t started yet. You can stream it on [POWER1029.com](http://POWER1029.com) starting next week if all the imaging is finished. My boss heard us on the phone talking about what the “gay mafia” allows to happen and he thought it was funny enough for a show. So I guess I told you all of this because I don’t know…. I feel like I’m searching to understand my life. No family, or boyfriend and I dread the thought of marriage and kids (I don’t do domestics). Sex has become very boring for me so I have decided to be celibate, and my career is growing everyday and that’s all I focus on….That and trying to be fabulous. I don’t know I just wonder if there are other women who are like me.
“Bonnie”

Can you describe your childhood? Are the any particular events you see as contributing to your current lifestyle?

I am from New York City and grew up on the Jersey Shore then lived most of my life in New Orleans (some in Vegas and a year of pure hell on earth in Arizona) but I think all those years in New Orleans made me what I am - I was so very at home there but for the side effects (I am so not a cold weather gal!). I do love Massachusetts just wish winters would go faster.

Brothers...no I have no brothers just a step brother my birth dad had long after mom and him divorced and I never got to know him which is ok he’s tons younger and became a white rapper which actually I find particularly pathetic and embarrassing...I’m the oldest of four girls one from a different dad each and one from my step dad who raised us (which is interesting cause she’s the most successful level headed one of us ...) I always wanted an older brother I told my mom cause then he could bring all his cute long haired friends home (I grew up in the late 70's) and funny I was a horribly late bloomer and ugly duckling ..My dad was the only main male figure around and he did anything mom said his main concern was that we don’t upset her ever as she fell in to her constant arguments with her mom and my grandma over things that happened many years ago. If I had had a brother come to think of it what a really bad example my dad working two jobs to support us all mom never drove even so he’d have to come home and drive her around -boy my brother would have been Eric on That 70's Show! lol!

My mother...boy howdy and here we go! (I think I actually love the fact she’d be horrified by my doing this and you’ll understand as we go along).

Background

Die hard fag hag (by this I mean I have gone to the extreme of total exclusion of relationships with straight men entirely though I have friendships with a very few select straight men they have the cliché gay qualities)
Let’s start with mom.
Upon thinking about this I see the correlation of my parents and parental figures and my attraction to gay men...as I come from a family of high drama – especially since all the women figures are each a matriarch of her own family pushy; bossy; highly intelligent and ambitious- that’s my mom , her mom, my grandmother the whole lot of them! All came from the wrong side of the tracks marrying up so to speak they all never got along with each other! And every single anthill became Mount Kilimanjaro lordy it was annoying.

Mom lived in New jersey and ran off with my birth dad at the age of 17 (he was from a rather well to do family, my mom ‘so so’) they had me divorced 3 years later my birth dad’s mother I’ll call her [redacted] and my mom hated each other with a pathetic vengeance that would go on to plague my life for the next forty years. My mom was very artistic creative - into Salvador Dally and John Waters movies, a genuine hippy who was sleek and Cher like and my grandma the perfect preppy, upwardly mobile stay at home mom. These two women would shove me back and forth between them for the first 17years of my life till I got away by running away from my grandmas permanently to go off stripping for the next ten years all thru the 80's (actually I had a blast till the cocaine became a problem much later on)

Mom married 4 or 5 times (its still debated how many) and in-between she found my wonderful step day who raised me and my 3 younger sisters, each from a different marriage. Now it turns out my dad also became a hippie got into the arts film the whole artsy culture (he came from Jewish money which I’m sure helped). He and mom became the most co-dependent couple that ever walked the earth! She and her Valium and her spectacular drama, him on the phone cause she was just too upset to deal with whatever - lordy they deserve each other!

I finally get along with them but even still to this day I am just mom’s toy to send expensive presents to and ignore till she feels like playing with me again.

I feel that relationships for a huge majority of women, suck...and have either stunted their growth or ruined their lives by abuse of many variations and if your reasonably smart even slightly ambitious and even semi open minded you can place an even bet that some guy will claim to fall in love with you and immediately try to change you, your wardrobe you hair colour your relationships with others and worst of all if you
do find the guy of your dreams well them what if he’s not attracted to you? Do you spend the rest of your life settling or compromising what you want in a man cause now the pop psych books tell you your standards are to high?

I’ve probably never met someone as unbelievably lucky as I’ve been when it comes to the man of my dreams. I knew I’d never have him (gay of course) so I worshiped him from afar - his dark boyish gypsy looks his talent his sensitivity and how he treated me. Five years later I meet him in person and not only is he everything I thought he was but he’s the nicest man I’ve ever met and treats me like I’m special to him. Christopher caused me to totally rethink did I get gypped with him because I can never have sex or a romantic relationship with him? But isn’t the man of your dreams the one who encourages yours, listens to your problems and in front of a room full of 60 people at a ritual picks me to lead out on the dance floor above everyone else when he knew how much that would mean to me? Isn’t that the very height of romance? The man who makes you feel like a Disney princess?

What is the downside of my fag hag lifestyle?

For me it’s not what the average person might think which I find is what about sex.? To me this is annoying but not the worst because my answer about sex usually just compounds the average ignorant reactions (and occasionally someone well meaning but can’t grasp the fag hag concept) I have sex with bi pretty boys that are extremely effeminate and usually prefer men; boys who are flamboyant and overly affectionate. Has this ever panned in to a relationship? If it ever does it still qualifies more to the fag hag lifestyle as I wouldn’t mind whoever it is having sex with men (I consider monogamy to mean no other women in the relationship or as a sexual partner)

Next downside usually always comes from men and funny always men I’ve specifically turned down cause even if I wasn’t an extreme fag hag I still wouldn’t date them! Their first words are usually ‘you’re so attractive why don’t you date men you can have sex with (this is a 90 percent of the time reaction) and because of exactly that statement why should I date men so I can have sex with them? Why is that straight men’s first concern? In my 45 years straight men’s horrible preoccupation with sex from not letting you get any sleep even if you have to work in the morning to catching them watching porno ( I absolutely am sickened by porno because I’ve been a long time sex industry worker thought not in porno and what those women go thru is anything but enjoyable!). If I would only find the right man
he could change my mind and always these arrogant guys assume they’re the right ones! I have that in common with gays and lesbians idiots always think if they find the right person they’ll be cured .. I hate getting hit on constantly it gives me the creeps...flirting is flattering to a polite point but no man seems to understand the cut off point which is ‘no I’m not interested…no I only hang with gay men…no I already have a relationship (which I do with Endymion even though we don’t have sex he fulfils my need for a male figure to get rid of all the creeps namely straight men). Do I hate straight men? Of course not …this is another drawback of my fag hag lifestyle if you develop a friendship with a straight man unfortunately most of them get the wrong idea that this is it they are the ones who’ve changed me when they already know me perfectly well enough to know its never what I want!

My mom has a weird thing against my hanging with gay men cant quite put my finger on it as she and dad are genuine hippies who raised us to never be prejudiced, to be open minded etc …but when I came out of the fag hag closet my mom asked ‘what will people think of you?’ Well for one thing there won’t be any unexpected pregnancies and you won’t have to save us from just one more abusive asshole…etc Mom has a weird issue with her brother my uncle Rob. One day out of the clear blue sky she said ‘uncle Rob is getting divorced cause he’s gay’ (ok I can accept that he’s coming out and taking responsibility for it) then, years later totally out of the blue mom says, ‘by the way uncle Rob not gay anymore’. I was so stunned I couldn’t say anything because I couldn’t believe my mom was so ignorant that she truly believed one day a person woke up and said *poof*, ‘I’m not gay anymore’!

The biggest drawback is that not all my gay friendships are the happy like Will and Grace – they’re work just like any other relationship *A* Endymion is not like *B* Christopher whom I have such a lovely foofy fairy tale ending. *A* Endymion broke my heart very badly. I was under the false impression that gay men are a gals best pal they’ll stand beside you no matter what. I thought *A* Endymion and I were going to have a happily ever after platonic relationship, we’d open a witch craft store together etc., his boyfriends would love me and we would be one big happy supportive family! Then *A* out of the blue gets involved with some horrible lying super rich kid stuck up brat and out of nowhere just plans to take of to
Wales to live in a castle and told me this without a word of any apology for upsetting our own plans or the fact he knew he was breaking my heart ...I was so crushed. I had all my other friends for support though including *B*... I cried for a week that was two months ago now - no castle. they never got engaged because the kid’s parents have all the money and obviously aren’t giving it to him. I got *A* on the phone and balled him out like crazy for dumping me and hurting me - we weren’t boyfriend and girlfriend of course and I’d love him to find a wonderful man and live happily ever after. What I learned was I can love my friend and have a relationship with him as he really is a brilliant genius who is still a cotton candy castle in the clouds chaser. I tried to make him into *B*...this is the biggest drawback of fag hag lifestyle I had to accept gay men were people too and not lovely best friend accessories like on TV and in the movies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Buckley, C. (2009). *The Liminal Rhetorical Space of the Fag Hag: Bridging Rhetoric and Queer Theory within ‘Sex and the City* Paper presented at the NCA 94th Annual...


