"CROSS-"ING COMEDY:

CONSTRUCTION OF A GENDERED PERSONA IN

THE WORK OF EDDIE IZZARD

By

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Introduction

During a theatrical production, bodies on stage present multiple identities to the audience. Though the audience accepts the existence of the characters being performed, it also acknowledges the presence of the *actors'* personal identity. The audience views these identities (both occupying a different reality) separately.   However, when looking at *theatrical* performances outside of the normal arena of a stereotypical theatre and its presentation of plays with characters and plots, this separation of performer and character disappears. In the work of solo performers, the lack of division stands out. The audience questions who the performer is trying to present and whether it changes throughout the performance. In some instances, the performer *is* presenting a specific character (i.e. the work of Anna Deavere Smith and her portrayal of characters based on interviews she has conducted) and continues to follow some of the conventions of traditional theatre. However, a performer may choose to create works that are auto-biographical, and when they perform, present "themselves." An example of this second category of solo artist is the stand-up comedian, who often uses events and incidents in his/her own life in the comic material. Though this material is frequently auto-biographical, the audience is left with the question of whether the "character" on stage is a reflection of the performer's personal identity or a separate entity. Further, because artists approach their material in different ways the answer to this question varies from performer to performer.

Performance studies scholars like Richard Schechner and Philip Auslander explore the interaction of identities outside of the realm of theatre, looking at such

paratheatrical events as religious ceremonies, stand-up comedy, and musical performances.[1] In analyzing these "performances," they ask a number of central questions. Elin Diamond gives a brief summation of these "powerful" questions:

> [Q]uestions of subjectivity (who is speaking/acting?), location (in what sites/spaces?), audience (who is watching?), commodification (who is in control?), conventionality (how are meanings produced?), politics (what ideological or social positions are being reinforced or contested?) – are embedded in the bodies and acts of performers. (qtd. in Auslander, *Introduction* 3)

Philip Auslander has been a leading scholar in post-modernism and performance studies since the 1980s. His work has centered on the political effects of various paratheatrical performances, including musical performances, stand-up comedy, and performance art. In a number of essays, he focuses on the power of a performer's body and how that body can relate various messages to its audience in performance. In his book *Performing Glam Rock*, Auslander introduces the concept of *persona*, which separates the various layers a musical performer presents on stage. He labels these layers as "the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (the performer's self-presentation), and the character (a figure portrayed in a song text)" (Auslander, *Glam* 4). The creation of personae includes an amalgamation of elements such as personality, critical thought, clothing, etc., to form a multi-dimensional being.

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[1] In *Performance Theory*, Richard Schechner examines various modes of performance. In defining paratheatrical performances, he cites role playing, dramatic therapy, and performances where "very personal stuff is integrated into or shown side by side with public/fictional materials…" (Schechner 132). Stand-up comedy, with its story-telling framework based on personal experience, mirrors the latter example.

The arena of stand-up comedy includes performers who have created numerous distinctive personae in their work. Each performer's performance persona, while comprising many elements, tends to focus on a particular component of that identity. For example, Margaret Cho's comedy highlights her Asian ancestry, while the Blue-Collar Comedy Tour zeros in on social and geographical stereotypes that characterize the performers (Southern rednecks).   Sexuality and gender roles also provide a focus for some performers. For instance, after her coming out, Ellen DeGeneres' comedy revolved around her sexuality whereas the topic of gender and gender roles encompassed the work of Roseanne.

Another stand-up comedian who has created gendered personae is Eddie Izzard. Izzard is a British stand-up comedian who has been performing since the mid-1990s. His material covers a wide range of subjects, from puberty to space exploration and beyond. However, it is not necessarily his choice in material that sets him apart from other comics. As a heterosexual transvestite comedian who comfortably performs in heels and lipstick, he becomes a distinctive individual in the world of stand-up comedy. His performances work to break down hetero-normative ideals of gender division.

The work of Eddie Izzard represents a combination of Auslander's two main foci: comedy and glam rock. As a transvestite, Izzard, like many female comics, works to dispel the notion that he is anything but normal. Though he wears make-up, he mirrors the glam rock performers in his need to assert his heterosexual identity. Through his material he redefines gender boundaries as he works to present the performance persona of a heterosexual male who just happens to wear women's clothes.

Because gender is central to Izzard's personae, the first chapter will focus on how gender is constructed, including its relation to transvestitism, and the ways in which dress communicates information. It also includes an exploration of the mutability of gender and identity. For exploration of cross-dressing and its cultural connections, this thesis will use the work of Marjorie Garber (*Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*), Charlotte Suthrell (*Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture)* and the team of Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins (*Identity and Dress)*. Garber's work presents a detailed overview of cross-dressing and its cultural impact. Suthrell, however, focuses more on the tradition of transvestitism in the U.K. Eicher and Roach-Higgins provide an analytical breakdown of the correlation between dress and identity. These three sources help to contextualize Izzard in the world of transvestitism. A number of reasons for cross-dressing exist along with stereotypes that many transvestites have to work against (i.e. cross-dresser equals homosexual). Izzard's performances delineate his goals for cross-dressing and actively work to dispel stereotypes.

The second chapter of this argument will focus on the creation of personae in paratheatrical performers. The focus will be on Philip Auslander's analysis of personae in the work of Andy Kaufmann, David Bowie, and Roseanne. These three performers occupy different places on the spectrum of the relationship between the three different personae. Like Eddie Izzard, all three deal with issues of gender and use techniques that are repeated in his work.

In the final section of my thesis, I will use the critical foundations I have established in order to analyze the gendered identities involved in the stand-up comedy of

Eddie Izzard. To provide a point of comparison, the two performances that will be

highlighted in this analysis are chosen from the beginning and most recent points in his

career. *Unrepeatable* (1994) and *Sexie* (2003) showcase Izzard and his presentation of

personae in two extreme examples. Since *Unrepeatable* was performed before he was

introduced to the American masses with his fifth live show, *Dress to Kill* (1998), this

thesis will investigate his work and persona before and after he had international fame.

These performances also provide a view of how the gendered messages that Izzard

communicates change.

   While analyzing these productions, the messages that are created by Izzard's

persona in and out of performance will be explored. This examination begins with the

actual designs of the DVD cases and elements such as menus and opening credits. From

the position of his legs to his own narration, these packaging and production components

show a clear progression from masculine to feminine. The investigation then moves to

Izzard's dress and set design. Both of these elements show Izzard's performance persona

trying to define itself as masculine amongst the, at times, overt feminine imagery. In this

section, color and the images shown behind him form most of the argument.

Performance style and material also provide examples that point toward the struggle for a

balance between gender roles in Izzard's work.

   Eddie Izzard's career provides a look at a performer who has created personae

that are intricately connected to gender. His personae also work to claim his right to be

who he is comfortable being (e.g. a transvestite) and that there is nothing wrong with who

he is. However, he does this in a more subversive way than most comedians. Instead of

making his material all about transvestitism, he allows the imagery, which is secondary to

what he is saying, to reflect his transvestite identity. Even the fact that he does not dwell on his cross-dressing lends to his performances this notion that he's just an average guy, talking about issues that appeal to a mass audience.

Gender, Dress and Transvestitism

While many components come together to create Eddie Izzard's identity and personae, the most visible is his transvestitism. Transvestitism is unique from other forms of cross-dressing, such as the drag/camp traditions or the transgender culture. Because drag/camp uses cross-dressing as an entertainment gimmick, it is less rooted in gender issues than transvestitism.[2] Transgendered/transsexual people are those who have received surgery and chemical enhancements to become the opposite sex. Because transvestites and transgender people have, at times, different objectives (ex. whether they just enjoy wearing clothing of the opposite sex or if they want to "become" another sex) the personal and social ramifications are different.[3]

Though only a relatively small part of Izzard's actual material deals with transvestitism, his dress, the design of his sets and the way he frames his performances through marketing lend comment on identity and gender. Gender is socially created and is defined by a set of codes which the sexes are to follow. This is especially true in regards to dress, which acts as a communicator of identity. For clarification, the term "dress" is used to signify not only clothing, but alterations to the body (i.e. hair style, nail polish, etc.). According to Magnus Hirschfield, the German sexologist who coined the term "transvestite," transvestitism centers on "psychical" or psychological gender signs, such as dress and names (Garber 132). Because transvestitism deals with crossing gender

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[2] According to the *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, "drag" is "the wearing of the costume of a sexual role not your own for the purposes of a performance" (Chambers 217). The terms "costume" and "performance" highlight the theatrical nature of drag.
[3] Jane Hegland provides the typical view that a transsexual "feels 'trapped' in the wrong body" and wishes to obtain a new one. (195)

boundaries in dress, it challenges the socially shaped "norms." Scholars and scientists have attempted to define transvestites and encode them with a different set of conventions. Izzard's performances provide numerous instances where he both adheres to and diverts from these constructs.

The terms "sex" and "gender" are often confused and used interchangeably. A brief delineation between the two will help to clarify arguments about gender found in this thesis. Since the 19th century, scientists, from sociologists to psychologists, have examined the relationship between sex and gender. Judith Butler has been a contemporary leader in this study. Butler argues that:

> Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex…If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. …When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and a woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. (qtd. in Suthrell 22)

Philip Auslander agrees with Butler when he states that if we are to view gender as being socially constructed, there is no reason why "behaviors coded as feminine" couldn't be

"enacted by men as well as women" (Auslander, "Glam" 140). This shows the instability inherent in gender. In the notes to their essay "Definition and Classification of Dress," Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, two of the leading scholars in dress and gender, define sex and gender. "Only since the 1960s have social scientists made a concerted effort to assign the term 'sex' to biological distinctions between females and males and the term 'gender' to variations in social roles learned by females and males" (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, "Definition" 23). They also clarify the use of various adjectives: "female and male emphasize biological differences between the sexes, while feminine and masculine indicate differences in social roles, hence gender" (23). While gender can cross sexes (e.g. a feminine man), this argument places no value judgments on the terms masculine or feminine.

Gender and dress are closely related. Sociologist Charlotte Suthrell, in her book *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture*, sums up the integral relation between identity (including gender) and clothing:

> It [clothing] is a strong and visible part of our need to assert identity –
> perhaps in Western society particularly, with its lack of clearly stated
> hierarchies and boundaries – and thus forms part of our individuation. It
> materializes the process of separation and aggregation in the process of
> becoming an autonomous self, whilst at the same time holding an element
> of ambiguity with regard to where the self (body) ends and dress begins…
> (14-15)

The clothing we wear defines who we are and provides one of the first visual clues about our identity. The spectator infers many things (i.e. sex, social status, religion, etc.)

because of our dress. [4] A performer then chooses his/her clothing carefully in order to convey a message to the audience from the moment he/she walks on stage.

Long before they can even comprehend making any choices for themselves, children have gender roles given to them, which they are then expected to maintain as they grow. Using gendered images (i.e. style and color of clothing), adults assign babies and infants gender roles. These "purveyors of culture" provide "gender-symbolic dress that encourages others to attribute masculine and feminine gender and to act on the basis of these attributions when interacting with the child" (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, "Dress, Gender" 101).[5] A very basic example of this phenomenon centers on the stereotypical practice of dressing boy infants in blue and girls in pink. While on the surface this provides a simple shortcut to the identification of the child's sex, it also places on them a large set of rules and regulations associated with the basic gender roles of their sex. As the child grows, he/she will learn from their parents and others what is socially acceptable dress for his/her sex and gender. While adults are expected to behave according to their gender roles, a misstep in a child (Eicher and Roach-Higgins use a young girl wearing pants as an example) can easily be overlooked. However, as children grow up, the assumption is that they will learn the "rights and responsibilities" of acting "as one looks" ("Dress, Gender" 102). When they break the rule, an adult sends a specific message to the spectator. In the case of a woman wearing pants, this message can be simple ("I like to wear pants") or complex ("I am adopting a historically masculine article

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[4] Eicher and Roach-Higgins actually created a form to outline "types" of dress and their properties. It breaks down body modifications (i.e. hair, nails, teeth, etc.) and body supplements (i.e. enclosures, attachments to the body and body enclosure, and hand-held objects). Then to each of these, they describe such properties as color, volume, texture, and even odor. Their essay "Definition and Classification of Dress" contains the full form they created.

[5] Janet Spence echoes this idea when she describes gender identity as "a primitive unarticulated concept of self initially laid down at an essentially preverbal stage of development and maintained at an unverbalized level" (qtd. in Trew 7).

of clothing to assert my dominance"). Izzard, an adult male who clearly breaks the rules, conveys a message about who he is and his thoughts about the mutability of gender. His attitude towards his dress in performance further expresses his views of his personae.

In his essay "The Surgical Self: Body Alteration and Identity," Philip Auslander discusses the unstable quality of identity. His exploration deals with performance artists Orlan and Kate Bornstein. In both of these examples, Auslander searches to define a "posthumanist self, a self for which identity is mutable, suspended, forever in process" (Auslander, "Surgical Self" 128) that challenges the notion that the self is stable. These examples show the changeable quality of identity and gender. As Charlotte Suthrell points out, "cultural notions regarding gender are demonstrably dynamic; they change from society to society and over time" (20). The changes that can be seen in Izzard's performances from *Unrepeatable* to *Sexie*, along with his own statements made in recent years, exemplify this "mutable" identity.

Orlan's performance centers on her series of plastic surgery operations. Using famous fine art pieces, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Sandro Botticelli's *Venus*, as models for her new face, she hopes to challenge ideals of beauty, while at the same time find her own identity. She does this by turning plastic surgery into a circus.[6] The most striking feature of her operations is the overt theatricality that she superimposes on them. Her surgery includes a script, props, music, dancers, and costumes. And the "art" doesn't stop with the actual surgery. Orlan sells videos of the operation, displays prints of her surgery in galleries, and creates art pieces using vials of extracted bodily

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[6] This reflects Craig Owen's idea that part of postmodernist political art is the use of "the very activity that is being denounced in order to denounce it" (qtd. in Auslander, "Surgical Self" 129).

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materials. Due to the highly theatrical and stylized way in which Orlan approaches her surgery, she becomes a performer, and not merely a plastic surgery patient.

The question arises: Which persona are we seeing? The fact that Orlan's identity is ever changing makes the answer to this question hard to find. Of course, she has a specific goal in mind: to make her outer self reflect her inner self. She has even gone as far as describing her projects as "a transsexual operation – from woman to woman" (qtd. in Auslander, "Surgical Self" 135). This alters the normal idea of crossing genders. Whereas some transsexuals and all transgender patients who feel that they were born in the wrong body hope to at least appear as the opposite sex, Orlan defines her move as a change within the female sex. This highlights the difference between the terms "sex" and "gender," where the former is rooted in physical and biological issues and the latter deals with more psychological matters. While Orlan's project deals with alteration of the body to fit her inner gender, while maintaining her own sex, Kate Bornstein's full transgender operation and performances reflect a change in body, including a switch of sex, to align her inner and outer identities.

Kate Bornstein is a performer who has gone through a "gender" reassignment surgery: going from male to female. Bornstein's view on gender is distinctive. While Orlan's goal was to match her body to a fixed inner self/gender, Bornstein views gender as always shifting. While summarizing her book, *Gender Outlaw*, Auslander says that, "Bornstein identifies gender as the single most oppressive socio-cultural discourse and advocates a program of active resistance to gender categories and their normative force" (Auslander, "Surgical Self" 136). "To settle for a singular gender is an act of self-denial: 'it's something we do to avoid or deny our full-expression'" (137). The idea that a

person's gender has the ability to shift is exemplified in Bornstein's use of the phrase "gender fluidity." "Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change" (138). While she focuses on the mutability of gender, the fluidness she ascribes to it can also be attributed to the larger arena of identity and persona. Both Roseanne and Izzard have undergone changes in their lives that reflect a change in gender.

Judith Butler's work proves that a strict dichotomy doesn't exist between man/woman and masculine and feminine. Cross-dressing provides an example of the separation between sex and gender. The construction of identity and gender in relationship to cross-dressing (in particular transvestitism) constitutes the main focus of scholar Marjorie Garber's work. In the introduction to her book, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety,* Garber states, "one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male,' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural" (10).

Numerous authors and scientists have tried to define cross-dressers and others like them who challenge the simple binaries.[7] Some have categorized them as a "third sex." Garber uses this idea of the "third" as a "way of describing a space of possibility" and an introduction of "crisis" in binary thinking (11). Another example of the "third" comes from Marjorie Garber's use of Jacques Lacan's idea of the relation between sexes being divided into three terms: "to have" the phallus, "to be" the phallus, and "to seem" to have the phallus. The male sex literally "has" the phallus whereas the female sex wants to have

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[7] Many of the earliest explorations come from Michel Foucault and Magnus Hirschfield. Contemporary scholars include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Marjorie Garber, and Judith Butler. Jonathan Goldberg provides an analysis of cross-dressing in the Renaissance.

the phallus and therefore "be" the male sex. It is in the third term, "to seem," that Garber places the transvestite (356). Even this "space of possibility" fails to succinctly define cross-dressers. Transvestites occupy an entire spectrum of options.

In her essay, "Drag Queens, Transvestites, Transsexuals: Stepping Across the Accepted Boundaries of Gender," Jane Hegland provides the following characterization of male transvestites:

> Most male transvestites are heterosexual, married with children, and cross-dressing tends to be linked with sexual activity. However, a transvestite may be homosexual or bisexual, single or divorced, an occasional or frequent cross-dresser, and the activity may not be connected to sexual arousal. (196)

While the definition is ambiguous at best, it does support transvestites' position in the "space of possibility." Hegland also states that the male transvestite "never forgets – and never allows his audience to forget – he is a man in feminine dress, although he does use a feminine name while cross-dressed" (196). Because of the various reasons and ways a person may cross-dress, it is reductive to say that all transvestites never forget their sexual identity. In *The Lazy Crossdresser*, Charles Anders, a cross-dresser himself, provides both a support book for cross-dressers as well as a "how-to" book. He spends a good portion of the beginning of the book helping the reader to understand and be comfortable with his (or her) own reasons for cross-dressing. This could mean working to forget their original sex and gender while in their gender-switched wardrobe. Suthrell supports this belief when she says:

I doubt very much – and some of my 'research subjects' whom I asked

confirm this – that they would go out as a man in a skirt. Female clothing

is reserved for the times in their lives when they want to feel like a

woman, to become their own particular rendition of a woman (even if only

temporarily) – and the clothing boundaries thus remain impermeable. (33-

4)

Depending on the reasons why the person cross-dresses, he/she may or may not wish to

hide their sex. In the case of Eddie Izzard, he *does* wish to maintain his male identity.

His transvestitism centers on his need to express his feminine side and his enjoyment of

women's clothes. This enjoyment, however, should not be confused with a fetishistic

sexual pleasure while wearing feminine clothing. No part of his performance or

comments made by him point to this particular reason for cross-dressing.

As Hegland states, the majority of cross-dressers are heterosexual. This goes

against the popular misconception. Suthrell quotes Annie Woodhouse, author of

Fantastic Women:

Masculinity is treated as a thing itself, something to be achieved by all

men. Those who do not evince a convincing image of masculinity have

failed and, in the common parlance of insult, they become effeminate. It

is no accident that transvestites are commonly thought to be homosexual;

after all, any man who is effeminate cannot be heterosexual, there must be

something 'wrong' with him. (qtd. in Suthrell 33)

This stereotype of the gay cross-dresser has caused some transvestites (and drag

performers) to make it a point to express their masculinity. Vaudevillian female

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impersonators, such as Julian Eltinge, were known to pick fights just to remind people they were masculine heterosexual men. Not all transvestites and performers are this extreme, but they find other ways to express their identities. Izzard's use of subversive tactics works to create a mixture of masculine and feminine elements in his persona.

The concept of self-image is important to the transvestite. "Who am I?" becomes a crucial question, and the answer differs. Izzard strives throughout his performances to answer this question and communicate his identity to his audience. In the section of her book called "Transvestites, Constructed Selves, and Issues of Sex and Gender," Suthrell analyzes this question of self-image. Part of her research included a set of interviews and questionnaires conducted throughout Britain. The predominant view among the transvestites that she interviewed or who had filled out her questionnaire was that they "admire and often envy women" and that "they seek to emulate them both in clothing and behaviour, and that they recognize that this is not well tolerated by the society in which they live (and they wish it were)" (177). On the one hand, some of the people she interviewed expressed a sense that their identity was an integrated combination of the masculine and feminine. However, the majority of her "subjects" seemed to support a "model of instinctive separation of the dual male/female modes" (177). This suggests then that these transvestites actually have two identities residing their bodies at the same time. The use of separate names for their feminine and masculine selves seems to coincide with this notion. One of Suthrell's interviewees, John/Joy, states that he "never allows himself to 'mix' the male and female sides of himself and clearly does not perceive the notion of having two selves as a problem" (177).

Dress can communicate power and relationships. In many modern societies, including the Unite States, "male" and "masculine" are often associated with higher power and social standing. This syndrome was significant in the 1980s when more and more women professionals were adopting a wardrobe that would hide their feminine physique (e.g. shoulder pads). Emmanuel Reynaud gives a colorful example of this social standing between men and women: "In France… a woman who has to take an examination, or go to a job interview, is advised not to wear trousers. She must show her legs and make her vagina accessible, whereas a man does not have to reveal his calves or offer easy access to his penis" (402). A male transvestite who wears a dress or a skirt puts himself in a position where there is "easy access to his penis." The alteration that Izzard undergoes throughout his career mirrors this switch to vulnerability.

The donning of female clothing for a male often marks him as effeminate and not a "full man" in society's eyes. We find transvestites occupying a liminal existence in the spectrum of men vs. women and masculine vs. feminine. Where do they fall on the social power ladder? Because of the varied reasons why and distances to which people cross-dress, the answer to this question is also wide-ranging. Izzards uses masculine and feminine imagery to create personae that reflect the changing relationship between genders in his personal identity. He also calls into question whether gender should play a part in a person's position in society.

The Creation of Identity and Persona

The concept of identity, and specifically gendered identities, in relation to paratheatrical performance is fraught with questions (i.e. Who is on stage? Who is making us laugh? What are they trying to do?). This is true of stand-up comedy, where the line between personal identity and performance persona sometimes disappears. The concept of a gendered identity is especially poignant in the realm of glam rock and its extreme and continuous blurring of gender roles. Due to the careful construction of paratheatrical performer's personae, the questions of "Who?" and "What?" are hard to answer. Andy Kaufmann works to define his characters in such a way that the audience is meant to ignore completely his personal identity, whereas David Bowie's intentional confusion of identity denies the heterosexual hegemony of rock and roll. The fact that each performer approaches the creation of his/her persona differently produces a large range of options.   Philip Auslander has investigated the arena of stand-up comedy and rock music in a number of essays and books. In his exploration of various performers, he zeroes in on distinct expressions of identity in each of their works. His analysis is influenced by post-modern theories and attempts to deconstruct performances and performers in order to discover underlying identity messages (i.e., Bowie's comment on the heterosexual norms or rock and roll or Roseanne's work to claim her right to be the loud and brazen woman she is). Three performers that he analyzes who have created unique "characters" are Andy Kaufman, David Bowie, and Roseanne. Each of these performers represents a different place on the continuum Auslander has created in his

discussion of the real person, the performance persona, and the character. These performers illustrate the separation or lack thereof between these personae. From a performer such as Kaufman who detaches his "real person" from the characters he creates to Roseanne whose line between real person, performance persona and character is (at times) non-existent, the possibilities for paratheatrical performers are endless. While these three artists approach their personae differently, they all present performance identities that focus on gender roles and use techniques (also used in Eddie Izzard's work) that express their gendered identities.

In *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance*, Philip Auslander focuses on "stand-up comics who have found ways of mounting a critical discourse from within the terms of postmodern mediatized culture" (Auslander, "Comedy" 139). As examples, Auslander uses Andy Kaufman and Sandra Bernhardt. Kaufman's work is distinctive in the way he creates characters that gain a life of their own. During much of his career, Kaufman worked to build characters in such a way that they could sustain their own identity on stage and be "less vulnerable to an audience's consciousness of his [Kaufman's] intentions and presence" (143).

While some of Kaufman's earlier work strove to mask Kaufman's personal identity, it wasn't until he created the greasy-haired lounge singer, Tony Clifton, that the line between personae was absolute. Kaufman went to great lengths to prove to the world that Clifton was a real person and not a character created and performed by him. In performances, Clifton would appear with "his" family. He also had his own agent. Remembering Kaufman's transformation into Clifton, Bob Zmuda reflects:

I followed him and watched his face as he gazed into the mirror, now

wholly unrecognizable as Andy Kaufman. There was a brief flicker of

surprise and satisfaction, then Andy completely vanished. His body

shifted and he assumed a different posture in a split second. (Zmuda 129)

Kaufman even staged arguments between Clifton and himself. During their own

performances, both would also talk about the other as if they weren't the same person.

One of the biggest ploys used by Kaufman to create this rift between him and this

persona he created occurred during the filming of *Taxi*. Even though the television studio

already had a contract with Andy Kaufman, they hired Tony Clifton separately in order to

promote the idea of separate identities. During the shoot, Clifton became difficult to

work with, created a scene, and was then thrown out. This episode was witnessed by a

select group of people, but was disseminated to the media. This stunt cemented Clifton

as a real character, and he became, as Auslander states, a "media-created simulacrum"

(Auslander, "Comedy" 144).

With Kaufman's success in creating a persona that separated from his personal

identity came criticism from the rest of the stand-up comedy world. What Kaufman was

hoping to do, and ultimately did, went against what many thought was part of the goal of

stand-up comedy. Steve Allen talked about how the "Clifton routine did not contain

enough 'conventionally funny' moments at which the audience could simply laugh at

Clifton as a caricature of a show business small-time" (Auslander, "Comedy" 144-45).

Auslander also quotes Carl Reiner and his reaction to Kaufman's work:

Unless you let the audience in on the joke, you are making fools of

them… The audience would love to be able to say "My God, what a

wonderful character that man is playing, you can't even see him." But they

have to know it's really him, really Andy Kaufman. He has to tell them,

somehow… At least then there's an audience catharsis, even if it's anger

instead of laughter. But they have to know why' they're angry or

laughing. (qtd. in Auslander, "Comedy" 145)

While Izzard doesn't perform a "character" on stage like Kaufman does, he still presents

multiple personae: personal identity and performance persona. There is arguably also a

third persona there, that of comic writer. When a joke fails, instead of ignoring the fact,

Izzard often makes comments such as, "should have been funnier" (Izzard, *Sexie*). This

acknowledgement that he has taken time outside of the performance to plan his material,

allows the audience to see behind the performance persona. This then lets them be at

ease and experience a "catharsis," now that they know that the person on stage is human

and can make mistakes too.

Another of Kaufman's creations worked toward creating a specifically gendered

persona. Toward the end of his career, he created a performance event that featured him

wrestling with women. In this "material," Kaufman would ask women in the audience to

volunteer to beat him in a wrestling match. To egg the women on, he would adopt an

arrogant tone of voice and state:

I've proven it! The only thing women are capable of doing mentally is

cooking the carrots, washing the potatoes, scrubbing the floor, raising the

babies. Even the ones who scream "Women are equal, women are smart,"

even they can't do it. In sixty-five matches no woman has beaten me.

Why? (qtd. in Auslander, "Comedy 146)

There was always a woman who answered the call and Kaufman always won. By asking women to step up and prove they were not inferior to men, the performances thematized "the antifeminist backlash of the 1980s" (146). This echoed "real" professional wrestling which mirrored the current political views, often naming its wrestlers in the vein of "The Arab" or "The Russian," depending on the state of affairs at the time (146). If Kaufman's performances consciously imitated professional wrestling, they then become a satirical event that the audience would see as just a production (147). The extremely over-the-top mode of presentation allowed a subversive gendered message to be communicated to the spectators. Even when Izzard mentions cross-dressing in his material, which is infrequent, the way in which he presents it is, like Kaufman's wrestling matches, often exaggerated and extreme. This is seen particularly in his *Sexie* performance. In it, he discusses exploding breast implants and a new laughable superhero named Captain Transvestite. These situations, while extreme, are such a small part of his material that they become subversive.

Mark Fortier offers another postmodern view on Kaufman and the personae that he creates. According to him, though it may be assumed that Kaufman doesn't have the same moral outlook as his character, in the end that is not the point. He believes that the remarks take on a life of their own, in the same way relentless "in-fun" teasing can become obnoxious. In response to the lengths to which Kaufman went to maintain a separate identity, Fortier thinks that, "these precautions only thicken the confusion rather than clarifying the reality. The real is not ultimately the issue here any more. Performance and confrontation have created their own hyperreality, their own Andy Kaufman" (Fortier 190-91). In this view, Kaufman has failed to create distinct identities

apart from him. Instead, he has only created a different version of his own identity. Even with comedians whose performance persona mirrors their personal identity, because of the performative nature of stand-up comedy (i.e. pre-planned material, blocking, etc.), they still only provide a "version" of themselves.

Kaufman's work ultimately relies on creating a chasm between him and the various personae he creates: the "real person" doesn't even occupy the same space as "the character." There are performers who, while not presenting their personal identity to the audience, create performance persona and characters that are highly colored by their own identity. During his career, David Bowie crafted personae that echoed his personal identity and was centered in gender issues.

Auslander, in his book *Glam Rock*, discusses David Bowie and his impact on the world of rock. Bowie's fame came with the construction of the character Ziggy Stardust. Auslander begins his analysis of Bowie's performance and persona stating that "by asserting the performativity of gender and sexuality through the queer Ziggy Stardust persona, Bowie challenged both the conventional sexuality of rock culture and the concept of a foundational sexual identity…" (106). Bowie's presentation of his personae was at times aggressive (e.g. extremely feminine make-up and clothing). At other times, however, his attack on the hegemony was more subversive (e.g. the use of a feminine sound while presenting a heterosexual male character in a song). Like Bowie, Eddie Izzard uses a juxtaposition of extreme and subtle tactics in the assertion of his personae. Izzard also incorporates many of the same devices found in Bowie's performances of Ziggy Stardust.

Bowie differed in his approach to performing and persona creation from other rock stars. Auslander cites performers like Alice Cooper and Gary Glitter, who created such strong personae that it was easy for audiences to believe that the characters were "an authentic expression of the performer's self" (112). Bowie, who thought of what he did as theatre, viewed the character of Ziggy Stardust as an actor would any role. The performer can, and will, step out of a character and move on to the next one. This can be seen in his pre-Stardust albums where he found it imperative to fully create a separate character for each of the songs he performed. He achieved this separation mainly through changing his vocal quality and pitch (i.e. changing accents, singing in a harsh tone, etc.) Even though each song had its own character, Bowie's personal identity and performance persona was present.

However, "David Bowie" would soon disappear from the stage for a brief time. In 1972, the world was introduced to Ziggy Stardust. This bisexual alien created a complex relationship between the three personae:

> Ziggy, rather than Bowie, became the actor who impersonated the characters delineated in the songs, yet Ziggy was also a fictional entity enacted by Bowie. Revealed on stage, the 'real person' who portrayed the characters in the recording turned out not to be the real person at all. Just to make matters more complex, Ziggy was himself a character from one of Bowie's songs, meaning that Ziggy was sometimes singing about himself. (Auslander, *Glam* 120)

The complexity that was created by Ziggy Stardust obliterated Bowie's personal identity. The character became vastly more important than Bowie and morphed into another performance persona.

Bisexuality was the center of the Ziggy persona. Ken McLeod states that "Bowie's alien persona was emblematic of his bi-sexual alienation from the heterosexual male-dominated world of rock" (qtd. in Auslander, "Glam" 132). This bisexuality has also been described as a metaphor for Bowie's personal identity (133). Bowie's own sexuality was always at question. Fans thought he was gay and even an article in *Gay News* hoped that Bowie would give "gay rock a potent spokesman" (133-4). Bowie himself added to this by stating "I'm gay… and always have been" (134). This statement that he's "gay" points to his challenging of societal norms. Since his appearance did not fit the masculine, and therefore heterosexual, model that society has created, he "must" be gay. Bowie, instead of saying how unusual his persona was, uses the "always have been" declaration to state that whether he cross-dressed or not, he was the same "normal" person. This affirmation of being normal is also the central goal of Izzard's personae.

In his analysis of the Ziggy Stardust character in relationship to Bowie's personal identity, Auslander turns to the field of gender construction to find a way to describe the persona created. Using Judith Butler's idea that "gender attributes… are not expressive but performative," Auslander states that:

> Bowie's presentation of his sexuality on these occasions suggests a
> perception of such identities as performative, not expressive. His
> performance of a gay or bisexual identity did not express some essential

quality of his person; it was, rather, a performance of signs that are

socially legible as constituting a gay identity. (135)

In other words, Bowie had simply adopted "signs" that are normally read as homosexual

and did not reflect his personal identity. This returns to Elin Diamond's set of

performance studies questions: "Who is acting/speaking?"

Other performance studies questions such as, "Who is in control?" and "What

social positions are being reinforced or contested?," also are significant in Bowie's work.

Auslander states that, "Bowie's performance of a gay sexuality was multiply subversive"

(135). Using various levels of defiance, his performances ultimately challenged the

heterosexual image of rock music. This defiance came through the use of a "sexual

identity previously excluded from rock" and overtly theatrical performance (135). Even

though his performance persona/character had a definite gender identity, his music was

not so well defined, though still subversive. Only one song on *Ziggy Stardust and the*

Spiders from Mars contained an obvious homosexual perspective. The song "Lady

Stardust" contains a character who wears makeup, is male and who "coyly admits to

having a sexual attraction to the singer on which he feels he cannot act" (136).

While only "Lady Stardust" contains any question of sexuality, Bowie continues

to challenge the heterosexual rock world in his other songs. Whereas rock and roll

worked to maintain the separation between masculine in feminine, glam rock looked

toward a more fluid relationship. In "Hang on to Yourself" and "Suffragette City" the

scenarios *do* reflect the heterosexual mind frame. However, his vocal presentation of

these scenarios and lyrics undermine the heterosexual framework. Auslander describes

the performance of these songs as "played overly fast, sung in mannered voices, and

convey sexual urgency in almost parodic forms" (137). For example, in "Hang on to Yourself," Bowie's vocal style puts a "prissy-sounding emphasis" on certain words and takes on a "squeaky" and "imploring" tone at one point. While the words and situations are from a heterosexual male's viewpoint, Bowie uses his voice to parody the societal standards of the masculine gender.

One method of challenging norms involves a "replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames" as stated by Judith Butler (qtd. in Auslander, "Glam" 137). Auslander places Bowie's performance into this kind of event. By using a heterosexual dominated arena such as rock and roll to present a queer persona, Bowie calls into question society's construction of gender roles. Through this juxtaposition, he asserts everyone's right to express their emotions on the rock stage, regardless of sex, gender, or sexuality.

Finally, Auslander looks at some of the specifically feminine images present in Bowie's performance. In this section Auslander draws heavily on the work of Erving Goffman and his book *Gender Advertisements*. This book seeks to define the "postures, gestures, and facial expressions that seem to be coded as 'feminine'" ("Glam" 140). Auslander, in his look at the way Bowie changed his outfit frequently during a Ziggy Stardust performance, quotes a passage from Goffman's book:

> Women in ads seem to have a different relationship to their clothing and
> to the gestures worn with it. Within each broad category (formal,
> business, informal) there are choices which are considerably different
> from one another, and the sense is that one may as well try out various

possibilities to see what comes of it – as though life were as series of

costume balls. (qtd. in Auslander, "Glam" 145)

Changing clothing as a socially encoded feminine trait is also seen in young girls. When they are little, girls are given dolls (such as Barbie) to play with. One of the central entertainment elements in these toys is the ability to dress them in as many different outfits as possible. There are more outfits available for Barbie than Ken. This contrasts to boys, who are given G.I. Joe *action figures*. With G.I. Joe, the entertainment value lies in blowing things up and beating the bad guys. In this sense, not only were Bowie's costumes feminine, but the fact that he changed his look throughout the performance also reflects "the feminine lack of commitment to a single identity" (145). There is another layer of femininity that can be processed if we use Goffman as an example. Goffman, who describes the outlook women, as seen through ads, have on life as being "a series of costume balls," reflects Shakespeare's view that "all the world is a stage." This lends theatricality to the social construction of a feminine outlook. Bowie and his treatment of the rock stage as a theatrical experience parallels the constructed feminine view of life.

Throughout his analysis of Bowie's performance, Auslander separates the real person from the performance persona and character. However, this separation is not always clear in Bowie's performances, and part of Bowie can be found in Ziggy Stardust, and vice versa. The other end of the spectrum of personae relationships are those performers who create personae that are so close to their own identity that there is almost no separation between their personal identities and performance personae/characters. In his essay "Brought to You by Fem-Rage: Stand-Up Comedy and the Politics of Gender," Philip Auslander looks at the role of female comedians past and present and how that role

has changed. He begins with a discussion of female humor in the "patriarchal public sphere" (Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 109). He then offers a brief historical survey of women comedians and concludes by describing their current status with an analytical view of Roseanne's television special in 1987. Ultimately, he looks at the struggle female comedians have in asserting their identity.

In his analysis of "women's comedy in the patriarchal public sphere," Auslander begins with a statement made by comedy writer Anne Beatts that suggests, "that part of the reason for men's failure to acknowledge women's humor is that 'there is a women's culture that men just don't know about'" (qtd. in Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 109). He agrees that there is some validity in this statement, but argues that there is more at stake in the problem. Studies exist that connect humor to social power and dominance, which affects the relationship between female stand-up performers and audience. One study conducted by Howard Pollio and John Edgerly points to the fact that "people generally laugh along with those they perceive as more powerful than themselves" (qtd. in Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 110). In the end, this study breaks down into a very simple statement: "men talk and joke; women smile and laugh." Beatts states that by allowing women to perform stand-up comedy, men become afraid that they will lose their dominance (110). Stand-up comedy is a medium in which the performer must dominate the audience. Jerry Seinfeld expresses this view when he says, "To laugh is to be dominated" (qtd. in Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 111). This struggle for dominance becomes harder for the female comedian with the fact that stand-up comedy "has also assumed a heterosexual male audience" and is a "performance presented for the enjoyment of the

male gaze" (111). Because he does not conform to the heterosexual male model created by society, Izzard also strives to gain dominance over his audience.

Even when women do get the chance to perform stand-up comedy, they are under threat of being co-opted by the male gaze.[8] While the comedians' material may present a feminine view, the men who are in charge of marketing and introducing these performers alter the audience's perception. This reclamation is apparent in the context of video. Auslander examines the female stand-up comedian in relation to this medium. The packaging of the video *Women Tell the Dirtiest Jokes* features a row of blushing young sailors looking up at the female performer on stage. However, we only see the legs of the comedian. This choice creates a male-centered view of the woman, promising "raunchy women" and sets out to "objectify the female performer" (Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 114). Even the fact that the sailors are blushing suggests that "women have beaten men at their own game… and transforms the woman from a threatening Other into just one of the guys" (114-15). Auslander also examines the final song played over the end credits, "Pain." He views this song, that features such lyrics as "when you wet your pretty lips, girl, the feeling spreads," as a reduction of the woman to a "male-constructed object whose every move, even if unconsciously motivated, is to be seen as an attempt to attract the male's attention" (115). While the male gaze works hard to dominate performances by non-heterosexual males, artists, such as Roseanne and Eddie Izzard employ techniques to reclaim their power on stage.

A female comedian has to work hard in order to take control of the male-centered stage and audience. Auslander uses Roseanne's *The Roseanne Barr Show*, an HBO

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[8] The term "male gaze" comes from Laura Mulvey's work in film theory. She argues that the camera, as part of a male dominated industry, actively provides a male viewpoint and interpretation of feminine images on screen, while also placing an erotic twist on those same images (Mulvey 19).

television special, as an example of a performer and performance that actively works against the male gaze. He mentions Patricia Mellencamp's argument that, even though early female television comedians like Lucille Ball and Gracie Allen, challenged the dominance of men, "neither [Ball and Allen] escaped confinement and the tolerance of kindly fathers" (qtd. in Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 118). Auslander argues that Roseanne's use of both situation and stand-up comedy allows her to do what those earlier women couldn't. In a situation comedy, performers can create power relationships through their reactions to other physical characters. In stand-up comedy, "the comedian stands alone, unmediated by other characters; there is no George for every Gracie, no Ricky for every Lucy" (119).

Earlier female performers, such as Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers, focused on their faults and "failure" as women. Rivers comments on her inability to meet the standards of feminine beauty and Diller discusses her poor housewife skills. Roseanne, on the other hand expresses anger and rage in her work that is directed outward toward society and its patriarchal dominance. She presents her "faults" as ordinary. There is nothing wrong with her being fat and she insists that she is not abnormal. In one of her famous statements she proclaims, "If you're fat, just like *be* fat and shut up. And if you're thin – fuck you!" (Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 120). The message is clear: be who you are and don't apologize for it. This motto becomes central to many comedians, including Izzard, who work against societal norms.

Joanne R. Gilbert uses Roseanne as the leading example of "bitch comics" that use "material that criticizes and denigrates men at both the personal and cultural levels" (111). This can be seen in Roseanne's examination of the male preoccupation with the

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phallus. In one part of her routine, she agrees that men are better map readers than women "'cause only the male mind could conceive of one inch equaling a hundred miles" (qtd. in Auslander, "Fem-Rage" 121). Not only have female comedians made fun of the phallus, they have also adopted the phallus as their own, gaining control. Roseanne's routine ends with her response to the accusation that her comedy is "unfeminine," because of its aggressiveness. Her response: "Suck my dick!" (122). In response to Roseanne's statement, Auslander says that she has become a "self constructed" woman with a penis and challenges the "cultural values that assert that women are not supposed to be aggressive and funny" (122). Instead of being dominated by the male sex and feeling inferior to it, these women take the source of the men's power and make it their own. They also question the gender roles attributed to men and women. This can also be seen in their control of the central image of stand-up comedy: the phallic microphone. Not only are they able to approach and talk into the microphone, but as John Limon states in *Stand-up Comedy in Theory, or, Abjection in Amercia*, it is the power to *take* the microphone and move around with it that allows women the power over the phallus (117).

Auslander ends his analysis of Roseanne's show by looking at the three levels of performance that encase the show. One level shows her with her "real" family. The next level deals with her fictional family that she discusses about in her routine. Finally, there is the fact that her performance is sponsored by the product "Fem-Rage." Within both of her real and fictional families, a battle ensues where Roseanne tries to break from the confinement of domesticity. Even in her "real" family, while supporting her by laughing at her jokes, there is criticism of her material. On the other hand, as the creator of this

world, Roseanne has power to shape and reshape her family. It is, however, in the final

level of performance that we see the highest level of retaliation. "Fem-Rage" is a product

that "gives women the strength to stand up to a male-dominated world" (Auslander,

"Fem-Rage" 124). Even the announcer who introduces the product and commercial

becomes an icon of female dominance. Auslander remarks that, since the announcer is

seen and obviously speaking for Roseanne's character and is in her employment, he is not

a sign of any male control (124). This announcer represents a contrast to the one in

Women Tell the Dirtiest Jokes. In the video, the first announcer introduces all the women

as "eight lovely ladies." The second announcer "takes over to introduce each of the acts,

becoming an invisible and pervasive authority, defining each woman and categorizing her

work. In some cases, the implications of the categorizing are disturbing, as when the

voice refers to LaWanda Page as "the black queen of comedy" (115). In these cases, the

male announcer has control over the female performers, unlike Roseanne and the "Fem-

Rage" announcer.

    A performer's identity and persona is central to their work. It defines who they

are and how well their messages are received by an audience. While each performer

creates their personae in different ways, Kaufman, Bowie, and Roseanne use their media

to explore the intricacies of identity and to comment on society. It is clear that the

paratheatrical stage can foster ideas, no matter the strategies employed by performers in

forming their personae.

Eddie Izzard

Eddie Izzard has been performing professionally in stand-up since the end of the 1980s. He has appeared in numerous films such as *Mystery Men* and *Velvet Goldmine*. In March 2007, he premiered his new television series *The Riches* on FX alongside Minnie Driver. However, his stand-up has made the largest impact. This is not because of the material he chooses, since the topics he discusses are (for the most part) apolitical. Even when his material is political, he couches it in a laid back style. For example, his discussion on the Spanish Inquisition and the Anglican Church in *Dress to Kill*, becomes a farce, *a la* Mel Brooks' *History of the World: Part One*. The personae he creates, however, challenge societal norms concerning gender. Izzard views gender as a continuum allowing a large range of options, but "society wants this big fucking motorway between the two sexes" (Izzard, *Dress* 71). Izzard uses media packaging, dress, sets, and (to a lesser extent) his material to express his identity and subversively comment on socially created gender roles.[9]

As discussed in the chapter "Gender, Transvestitism and Dress," many transvestites confront the stereotype that cross-dressers are homosexual. Just like the vaudevillian female impersonators, transvestites will sometimes make it a point to show their heterosexual identities. Eddie Izzard's performance persona is a mixture of the masculine and feminine, but his goal is to ensure that the audience is aware of his status

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[9] This subversive nature of Izzard's performance is reflected in a review by Peter Plagens: "Izzard's comedy is so intellectual, gracefully structured, and kindhearted that his trademark gender bending ('executive transvestite') is just a cherry on the cake" (Plagens). While the audience is captivated by his material and style, they are being subjected to a discussion about gender and society.

as both male and heterosexual. While his earlier performances showcase the assertion of this part of his identity, the persistence of his masculine identity fades in his later performances. *Unrepeatable* (1994) and *Sexie* (2003), his first and last (respectively) filmed performances, showcase this change in persona. While Izzard presents many feminine qualities in his later performances, numerous "masculine" techniques (e.g. persistent use of swearing) remain constant throughout his career.

  Unrepeatable was filmed in 1994 at the Abbey Theatre. This was three years after Izzard came out publicly as a transvestite, though he came out to himself and close friends in 1985 (Izzard, *Dress* 62). His earlier performance persona showed only glimpses of his transvestite identity. This was mainly due to the fact that Izzard was trying to find his spot in both society and on the stand-up comedy stage. When he first publicly came out, he was met with mixed reactions. His close friends accepted him, while psychiatrists tried to "cure" him of his transvestitism. He has also been physically attacked (62-3). Though afraid of the reactions he would get, Izzard forced himself to go out in feminine dress and found a "strength in being open about things," especially his transvestitism (74). As his career continues, he has become more comfortable with his personal identity.

  The cover to the DVD of *Unrepeatable* (see fig. 1) is an excellent early example of this very subdued transvestite persona. The lettering is simple and the color, for the most part, is a light blue against the white in the background and on Izzard's plaid shirt. The only departure from this very masculine blue color scheme is the hot pink nail polish. The pink nails are positioned on the lower left focal point, drawing the eyes easily to them. While the nails provide a color contrast, the relationship between the entire hand
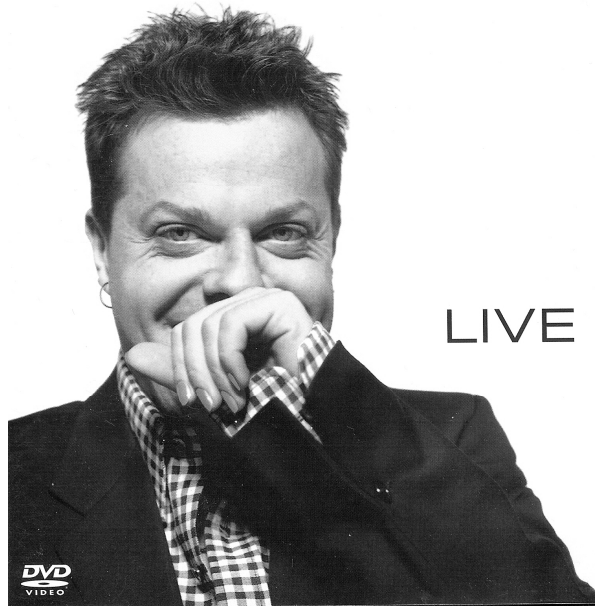
Fig. 1. *Unrepeatable* DVD cover.

and face dominates the cover. The hand covers a grinning mouth. The smile in return

pushes the cheeks higher, narrowing the eyes, creating a playful squint. This little smirk

to the audience, along with the quick flash of the nails, sends a subversive message that

all may not be as it seems. With the dominance of blue and male clothing, Izzard asserts

the masculine side of his identity, while giving a glimpse into the feminine.[10]

During the opening credits on the DVD, Eddie Izzard provides a monologue

commenting on the theatre space, the audience, etc. He reflects on the "groovy" theatre

and the fact that since the audience knows they are being taped, they will most likely

"seize up." Like the cases of announcers mentioned in the section on Roseanne, the role

of announcer in this performance aids the creation of persona. Rather than having a

generic announcer provide the information or having no spoken text during the credits

and simply panning the audience and backstage areas, Izzard takes control of the

performance from the start. The DVD audience is first introduced to his voice. Because

of the lack of any feminine quality to his voice, Izzard's masculine identity is asserted

early on. Even though this introduction is in fact an interview, the interviewer is seldom

heard and is definitely subordinate to the interviewee.

When the show starts the DVD audience again sees the dominance of blue. Not

only is Izzard wearing a blue jacket, but the three banners behind him are also blue (see

figs. 2 and 3). The images appear to be a second audience looking out at him and the real

audience. This new audience helps to centralize the focus on Izzard. The blue color of

this group of people creates an aura of masculinity surrounding Izzard's performance.

The *three* images reflect Marjorie Garber's idea of transvestites being a third gender.

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[10] This goal echoes Hegland's statement that the transvestite never allows himself or his audience to forget
that he is male. While it is important to reiterate that this is not the goal of all transvestites, it *is* definitely
the main goal of Izzard's performance persona.

Fig. 2. Close-up of Izzard in *Unrepeatable*.

Fig. 3. The three banners in Izzard's *Unrepeatable*.

The microphone, as referred to earlier, is the main symbol of stand-up comedy. This obviously phallic instrument has marked stand-up comedy as a male-dominated sphere. Izzard takes advantage of this. The microphone never leaves his hand during *Unrepeatable*. In *Dress to Kill*, however, he dons a body-microphone that is practically invisible. In that performance it seems that Izzard is stating that he is man enough, and doesn't need the phallic symbol. He has moved from "seeming to have the phallus," and therefore needing a physical manifestation of it, to "having the phallus," and feeling that there is no need to show it.

Little material dealing with transvestitism occurs in *Unrepeatable*. His first mention of transvestitism is centered on his coming out. He discusses the fact that since he is an open transvestite, it rids people of the power to gossip about him. Even in this bit of material his goal of creating a masculine persona is achieved. By robbing people of their ability to gossip, he has gained dominance over them. His transvestite material is also his most auto-biographical. In *Unrepeatable* and *Dress to Kill* (book), he describes having been confronted by a group of men who were thrown by the fact that their victim (a man in woman's clothing) stood up to them. The inclusion of this particular story reinforces Izzard's relationship to his masculine gender. With the inclusion of the autobiographical material, his personae are not as separate as his performance persona and real self start to become merged.

As Izzard progresses through his career and becomes more comfortable with his transvestite identity, a shift occurs. His performances demonstrate more femininity. However, Izzard continues to express his heterosexual male identity. *Dress to Kill* was filmed and broadcast in 1998. His dress is slightly more feminine than in *Unrepeatable,*

but still quite subdued. While much of his material continues to be focused on other topics beside his transvestitism, he tackles the subject of the homosexual stereotype. Here he states the statistic that most transvestites are heterosexual, and relegates cross-dressing homosexuals to the sphere of "drag queens." While the assumption of all drag-queens being homosexual is wrong, it is clear that Izzard wants to be defined as heterosexual. He continues this defense by creating a series of terms to describe him. These terms are: "professional transvestite," "executive transvestite," "male lesbian," "male tomboy," and "action transvestite." The terms "professional," "executive," and "action" all signify the need for men to achieve success and have power. "Male lesbian" and "male tomboy" both use the word "male" to denote a very specific gender, and "lesbian" and "tomboy," denote a sexual preference for women, signaling Izzard's desire to be labeled as heterosexual. There is irony in the fact Izzard uses homosexual terms to support his claim of heterosexuality, though this could be a reflection of Auslander and Butler's notion of the "replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames" (Auslander, "Glam" 137). In order to assert his sexuality, Izzard frames it in gay words like "lesbian."

Like Roseanne, Eddie Izzard never adopts the idea that he is deviant and/or deficient. He shows his feminine side with pride, shown in his progressively more feminine clothing. Even when a joke fails, he doesn't appear deficient. Instead of ignoring the fact, he acknowledges it and shares with the audience its "failure." This strong attitude makes him more masculine. The strong mixture of feminine and masculine imagery characterizes Izzard's later performance persona.

Izzard's *Sexie* (2003) showcases his performance persona in an all-out battle between masculine and feminine. The cover to the DVD (see fig. 4) contains an array of images. "Eddie Izzard" and "Live" are printed in a graffiti-style font, while "Sexie" is red with lights inside. Already in the writing, we have a clash of gender: the hard graffiti against the glamorous red. However, the images below the text truly present a gender war. Izzard, while straddling a motorcycle and wearing fishnets and stiletto boots, applies red lipstick. This image is in sharp contrast to the overt masculine imagery shown on the cover of *Unrepeatable*.

The DVD covers of his shows, viewed in chronological order, show a progression from masculine to feminine imagery. With *Unrepeatable*, Izzard is only present from the chest up. On the covers of *Glorious* and *Definite Article* his entire body is shown, though on both his legs are crossed (see figs. 5 and 6). For *Dress to Kill* (see fig. 7), he is presented sitting with his legs apart, but his crotch area is well covered. The image makes a major shift for *Circle* (see fig. 8), where Izzard stands, wearing a half-open robe, showing lingerie underneath, and has his legs apart. While *Unrepeatable*'s cover shows Izzard's masculinity as dominant, *Sexie*'s presents a clash of gender images. It is as if Izzard has now become the female interviewee who couldn't wear pants so that her vagina was "accessible." The words chosen on the back of the DVD case are also feminine: funnie, girlie, touchie, cheekie, feelie, boobie, and sexie. Even the "-ie" endings on these words reflect a young girl's style of writing. Also on the back, there is a note that states the show is filmed in Eastbourne, where Izzard's father and grandfather were born. This
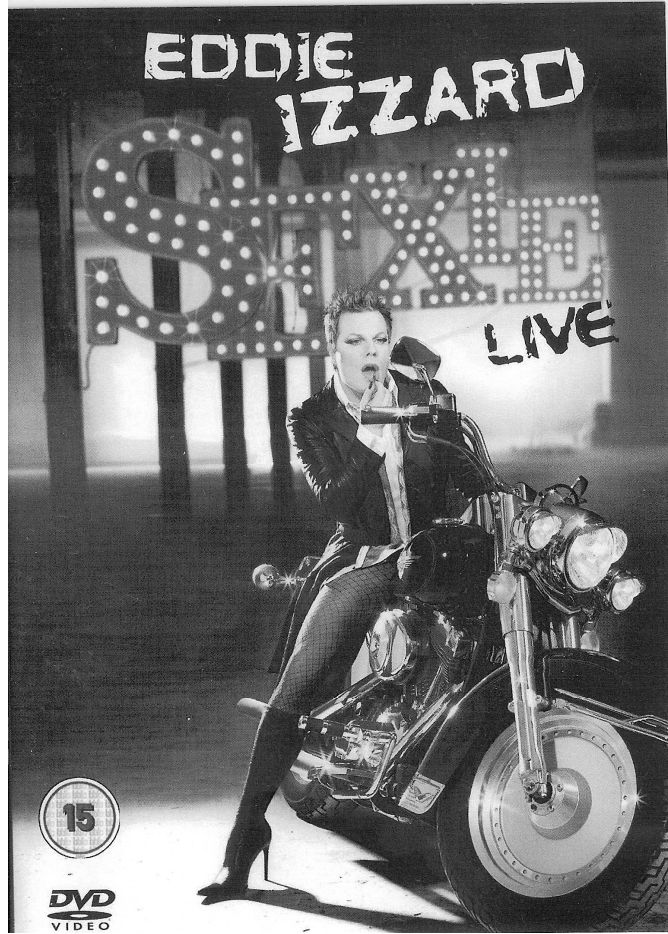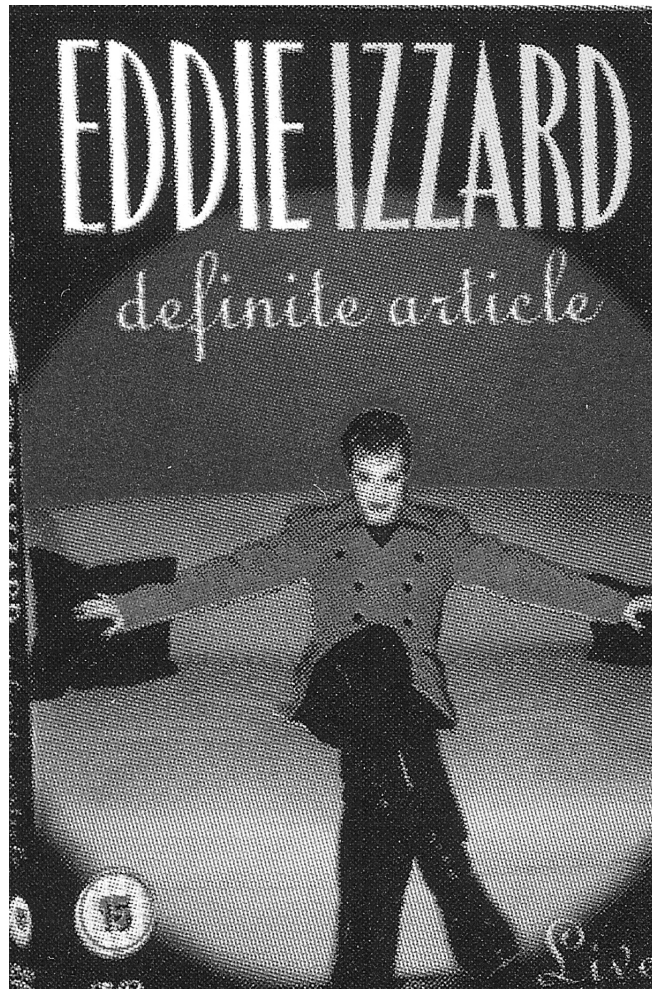
Fig. 4. *Sexie* DVD Cover.

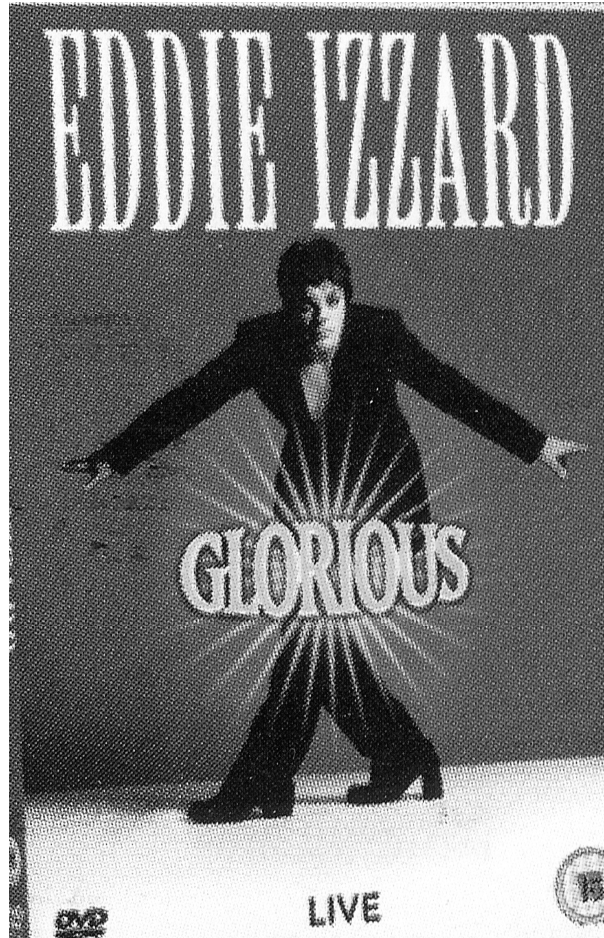Fig. 5. *Definite Article* DVD Cover.
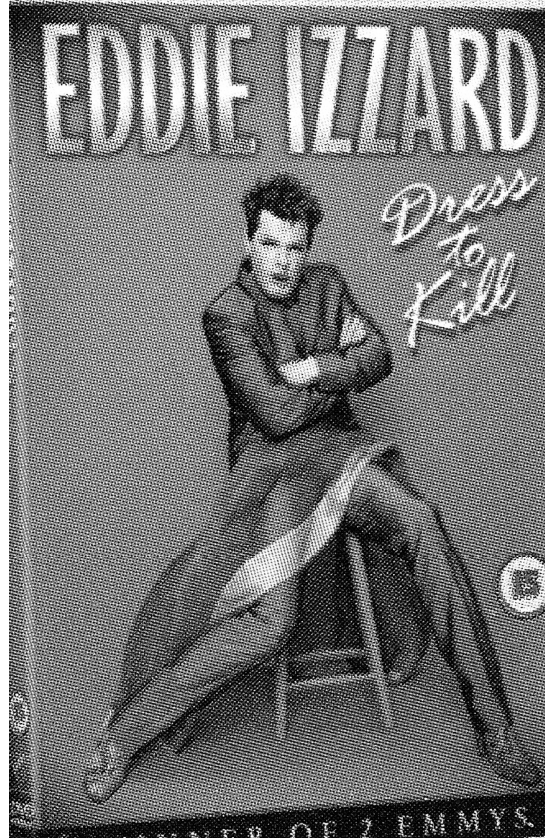
Fig. 6. *Glorious* DVD Cover

Fig. 7. *Dress to Kill* DVD Cover

Fig. 8. *Circle* DVD Cover.

connection with the male members of his family is a contrast to the feminine words on the top. A definite struggle for power occurs in the images on this particular case.[11]

Izzard's first outfit in *Sexie* is made-up of fishnets, mini-skirt, and removable breast implants (see fig. 9). He spends much of the first part of his show discussing his breasts. Unlike most male comics who dwell on the penis, Izzard states that he doesn't have penis envy, but has "penis ambivalence/nonchalance." He has, however, "breast envy." After intermission he appears in a different outfit (see fig. 10) and by the end of the show he's only in a corset and shimmering skirt. Izzard's love for clothing also appears in his material when he discusses thimbles.[12] Like with Bowie, the changing of clothes echoes Goffman's notion of the feminine desire to pursue all possibilities in dress (145). This exploration of possibilities is also seen in the changing backdrop. In the beginning, the background displays images of flowing water and the moon (see fig. 11). As the show enters into its second half, the backdrop is a morphing array of foggy colors, slowly turning into a picture of an impossible structure (see fig. 12) reminiscent of those created by M.C. Escher, and then reverting back to altering colors and shapes.

During his career a shift occurs in Izzard's performance persona. While his earlier work asserts the masculine-side of his identity, a definite feminine quality to his dress and the look of the production is present in his later work. However, besides his early discussion of breast implants and his brief talk on "Captain Transvestite" in *Sexie* his material still tends to be non-gender specific. He also maintains his masculinity by the continuance of his non-self-hating style and his tendency to swear. Because his

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[11] Even in the title menu introduction and the credits a confrontation of gender symbols happens. The title menu introduction features the silhouette of Izzard wearing his stiletto boots and the very masculine shooting target. During the credits, there is almost a sense of penetrating a vagina, as the DVD audience seems to rush forward down a tunnel of psychedelic images.

[12] Izzard even stopped mid-show to sew on a button when it fell off during a performance in 1996 (Wax).

Fig. 9. Close-up of Izzard's first outfit in *Sexie*.

Fig. 10. Close-up of Izzard's second outfit in *Sexie*.

Fig. 11. The feminine water and moon background in Izzard's *Sexie*.

Fig. 12. The impossible background in Izzard's *Sexie*.

material is the focus of his performances, the feminine elements found in his work act

subversively.

Conclusion

Izzard's career and performances comment on gender and identity on two planes. On one level his work subversively challenges societal constructs of gender. While his performances tend to share many of the same traits and goals as Roseanne's, he differs greatly on the basic approach. Whereas Roseanne's performances aggressively defy the male gaze and hegemony, Izzard's performances use subtler tactics. On another level, his entire career provides a meta-view of the instability of gender and identity. His performance persona changes over time, reflecting the alterations in his personal identity.

As mentioned in the introduction, performers often choose a particular element of their identity to showcase in their performances. Since stand-up comedy relies heavily on vocal dialogue, these elements of identity are expressed through the performer's comic material. This standard of performance is reflected in such performers as Roseanne and Ellen DeGeneres. Both of these comedians' acts revolve around their views of gender and sexuality (respectively). Izzard's performances, however, rely less on his material to challenge norms. In his work, Izzard discusses a variety of topics. He examines (among copious other things) history, religion, film, and conditioned behavior. Rarely does he mention his cross-dressing, and when he does, it is usually in a ridiculous manner (e.g. the exploding breast implants material). Unlike Roseanne's brazen personality and coarse material, Izzard's persona and topics relax the audience, allowing them to sit back and enjoy the show. Nevertheless, Izzard questions gender and its social construction through other means.

The visual elements of Izzard's performances (i.e. marketing material, sets and costuming) work on the audience in a subversive way. While listening to his material, the gendered symbols in the production make the audience (at least unconsciously) start to think about gender. The audience experiences a performer who epitomizes the fluidity of gender. In his stand-up comedy, Izzard never provides a persona that is singularly masculine or feminine. There is always an interaction between the two genders, each having moments of domination over the other as well as instances of harmony. In his earlier work, the masculine side of his identity is predominant, as seen by the use of blue on both the DVD cover and banners in *Unrepeatable.* In *Sexie,* the feminine facet of his identity comes to the foreground with his use of mini-skirts and breast implants. The change in Izzard's stance and clothing on the DVD covers represents this move toward a more feminine identity. The constantly shifting images projected on the back of the stage during *Sexie* symbolize the mutability of gender.

The transformation of identity occurs during many performers' careers. In "Brought to You by Fem-Rage," Auslander focuses his attention on Roseanne's HBO television special *The Roseanne Barr Show* in 1987. Auslander's essay was written in 1988. However, it wasn't until 1997 that he had the essay published in an anthology of his work. In the "Notes" section of this book, Auslander spends his final comment discussing the changes of identity and performance personae that Roseanne had undertaken since he had written the essay almost a decade earlier. One of the foci of Roseanne's performance was her celebration of and lack of apology for her non-feminine identity. Because her various personae are so close, any changes in her personal identity altered the personae on stage and screen. Auslander cites a number of events that

occurred in Roseanne's life after he had written this essay: divorce, remarriage, negative publicity, her controversial rendition of the national anthem, etc. After these events, Roseanne changed her persona, becoming an advocate for such issues as weight-loss and plastic surgery. This new identity then affected her performance persona. Auslander comments that "she sacrificed much of the edge that originally gave her stand-up comedy its pith and power" (Auslander, "Notes" 151). The changes in her persona didn't stop there. Her persona then returned to an echo of her original "character," after she divorced Tom Arnold. Like Roseanne, as Izzard's personal identity shifted, so did his performance personae.

During his career, Izzard's performance persona underwent a change, creating a more harmonious connection between his masculine and feminine sides was created. However, because of the fact that he never tries to hide his sex completely, his performance persona still leans toward a masculine heterosexuality. Within his performances we also see shifts between personae. At times he's like David Bowie, creating different characters that are separate from his personal identity. At other times, he's a mirror image of Roseanne, standing his ground and truly making his personal identity and performance persona the same thing. And even beyond 2003, Izzard's personae have changed and fluctuated. Unlike many of his previous projects (e.g. *All the Queen's Men)*, *The Riches*, presents Izzard as "normal." In this project he's a heterosexual non-cross-dressing married man.

The relationship between Eddie Izzard's various personae is always changing. At times, his true self and performance persona are separate, while at other times, there is no distinguishing between the two. His earlier work is heavily marked by the presence of

his heterosexual male identity, seen through his dress, design of the background, and some material choices. As his career develops and he becomes more comfortable with his own identity as a transvestite, more feminine gender symbols gain control in his work. The secondary nature of the gender images, compared to his mostly gender-less material, becomes a subversive commentary on the socially constructed nature of gender. While he wears feminine clothing, his laid-back style and focus on material that is common to a mass audience shows him as a normal average guy. There is nothing deficient about his identity and there is a place for everyone no matter where they are on the gender continuum. Izzard, along with other paratheatrical performers, show that the creation of performance personae can challenge society and become ever changing.

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Scope and Method of Study: This paper examines the construction of personae in paratheatrical performances, ultimately examining the personae of British heterosexual transvestite stand-up comedian Eddie Izzard. The first chapter examines the concept of "gender," in particular its connection with dress and the transvestite lifestyle. The second section provides a summary of Philip Auslander's work in personae in relation to glam rock and stand-up comedy. The work of three performers (Andy Kaufmann, David Bowie, and Roseanne) are compared and contrasted through the relationship between their "personal identity" to the "performance persona" and "characters" that they present on stage. The final chapter analyzes Izzard's *Unrepeatable* and *Sexie* performances, looking at the balance between masculine and feminine gender symbols present in his work.

Findings and Conclusions: Eddie Izzard's various personae are always at a constant fluctuation of relationship to each other. At times, his true self and performance persona are separate, while at other times, there is no distinguishing between the two. His earlier work is heavily marked by the presence of his heterosexual male identity, seen through his dress, design of the background, and some material choices. As his career develops and he becomes more comfortable with his own identity as a transvestite, more feminine gender symbols gain control in his work. Through an examination of Izzard's career and other paratheatrical performers, the creation of performance personae is seen as ever changing.

Advisor's Approval:_____