



VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION

A Queer History of Fashion

From the Closet to the Catwalk

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Video length: 6:22 | This video is online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXGofQAoi0Y

I recall my first job out of school was at GLAAD, which is the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation—it's a queer media organization. We got a call very early on from *W Magazine* and for some reason they chose me to do this interview, and the interview was about lesbian chic in advertising and sort of this new and recurring trend of using real or just perceived images of lesbians in advertising. And I gave this interview, and thought I did a great job and sort of said, "You know, I just worry—is this objectifying women? Is this sensationalizing lesbian identity?" And I thought it was a really good, strong interview. Then I got these e-mails from women in the community, lesbians saying, "Hey—I like those images! I like those advertisements! It's nice to see 'me,' or people in my community represented."

I love how fashion just gives us different ways to look at things and makes us sort of take that second look and think, this is how I feel about something, but how do other people feel, and what is that expression like? So it's ironic to me that my first interview was with this very iconic, very well-respected fashion magazine where I was sort of coming out against these images and then came to realize: 'Oh no, this can actually be a really great thing and provide some representation for a community that doesn't often get that.'

It's quite a treat to be able to come and talk about fashion. Fashion is sort of a passion of mine and kind of a hobby for me, but I will say that as I thought more about the LGBT, the queer community and fashion, there's such a natural overlap. We are two communities that care deeply about protecting self-expression and making sure that people are able to be who they are and express themselves in a way that feels good.

At the center we run a youth program. We have many young people who express themselves through fashion, and young people who are deeply passionate about how they present themselves to the world—not just as young people, but as young gay lesbian bisexual or transgender people. And we really provide a space at the Center in New York where they can express that. For some young women who come from really religious backgrounds, it's the first time in our groups that they get to wear pants, and it's such an opening of their world. For some young boys it's the first time that they show up in public in a dress, and for many of them it's the first place where that is embraced and celebrated. The first time The Center got sort of more deeply connected with the fashion industry was actually just this summer in June; we hosted a first event called 'Fashion Centered' and it was an introduction of the New York City LGBT Center to the fashion industry. It was a dinner, and we had quite an impressive list of honorary host committee members and designers who showed up. And it was so great. We had one of our very young people from the youth program speak about his interest in the industry and how The Center had really helped him become who he was and realize he wanted to work in this industry; he wanted to work in a place that really honored his expression and who he was. It's something we're planning on doing annually. There's such a nice dovetail of these two communities and it got me thinking about the fashion industry and just some of the tremendous philanthropy that the community has done—you know, DIFFA, the Design Industry Foundation Fighting AIDS is almost 30 years old, and you've got Jeffrey Fashion Cares—Jeffrey from right here in New York City—a fantastic icon in our community who not only has contributed creatively in many

ways but also contributed and contributes every year to LGBT and HIV and AIDS causes. I think our community really, really appreciates that kind of support.

When you come out as a queer person, as an LGBT person, you're coming out as someone who is different than the majority, and that is something that I think has always been celebrated in fashion—that uniqueness, that unique expression. And so it's given us, it's given queer kids and LGBT people of all ages a place to really look and feel honored and celebrated for being different, for being unique. And so it's something I really appreciate and feel very honored to live in New York City, where every day on most sidewalks there's a kind of runway going on. You get closer to our Center on 13th Street and, even when I was walking here, there was a fabulous young person with a zillion different colors and scarves and a vest in these fantastic heels walking down the street. And, I didn't know this person's gender; I didn't know what their sexual orientation was, but they looked like they felt really confident. And they were heading to The Center. It was a great moment. I love that we get to foster that here in New York City.

If anyone is interested in getting more information about the center, it's gaycenter.org or the main telephone number is 212-620-7310. ▼