



The L Word (TV Milestones Series)

Margaret T. McFadden

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In January 2004, Showtime debuted *The L Word*, the first prime-time commercial drama to center around lesbian characters. Over the course of six seasons, the show depicted the lives and loves of an evolving circle of friends in West Hollywood, California, and was widely read as evidence of changing social attitudes toward gay people. Building on immediate critical attention, the show reigned as Showtime's most popular for its first three seasons and earned a large and enthusiastic audience. In *The L Word*, author Margaret T. McFadden argues that the show is important for its subject matter, its extended and deeply literate commentary on the history of representation of lesbians in popular media, and the formal innovations it deployed to rewrite that history.

McFadden shows that the program's creators, led by executive producer Ilene Chaiken, were well aware of the assumptions and expectations that viewers would bring to it after a history of stereotypical depictions of lesbians on television. They sought to satisfy a diverse group of viewers who wanted honest and appealing portrayals of their lives while still attracting a large enough mainstream audience to make *The L Word* commercially viable. In five chapters, McFadden explores how the show tackled these problems of representation by using reflexivity as a strategy to make meaning, undertaking a complicitous critique of Hollywood, skillfully using a soap-drama format to draw in its audience, and ultimately creating its own complex representation of a lesbian community.

While deconstructing the history of misrepresentation of lesbians, *The L Word*'s new modes of storytelling and new perspectives made many aspects of lesbian experience, history, and culture visible to a large audience. Fans of the show as well as readers interested in cultural studies and gay and lesbian pop cultural history will enjoy this astute volume.

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