

loser ludicrous lewd lame laughable lacking leering laborious
lackluster lamentable languid languorous lassitude loathsome



By Constance Reeder

The Skinny on the L Word

Insemination isn't all that's artificial about "The L Word."

The Showtime drama being billed as "groundbreaking" should come with a warning: Best avoided if you are offended by images of heterosexual sex acts.

That's right: The hot new lesbian drama is full of het sex.

And that's not the worst of it.

The worst of it is that "The L Word" could help George Bush win another term.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's meet the main characters: There's skinny Bette, the Type-A, Saab-driving hottie, and her skinny, hot girlfriend, Tina, who is trying to get artificially inseminated. They hang out with Dana, a skinny brunette who plays tennis and hides in closets for a living; Alice, a skinny bisexual magazine writer; and Shane, who is both hot and skinny and specializes in kissing the girls and making them cry. Oh, and they all sit around a coffee shop owned by the skinny, hot Marina.

Are you starting to see a pattern

develop? Wait, there's more. Bette and Tina's straight-boy neighbor Tim is newly shackled up with his skinny, hot girlfriend, Jenny.

Lesbians, the kind who really do exist, are already screaming that tall, thin, impeccably clothed and coifed model-types are hardly representative of our community. Amen to that. I don't have anything against tall, skinny beautiful women, and I know plenty of lesbians fit that category. But if I want to be entertained by them on Sunday nights, I'll tune in to "Sex and the City." Those characters are consistently funny and have enough depth to draw the audience into their lives. That can't be said for "The L Word."

After watching the first five episodes, I've come to understand this: You can't expect realism out of a program that has a straight man walk out in the middle of a three-way with two lesbians. But I'm getting ahead of myself again.

Bette and Tina are in search of some fresh sperm with which to do the turkey-baster tango. They start

out all businesslike, explaining to potential donors that the men must sign a contract waiving their parental rights. One man is all set to agree until he realizes the deal does not involve sex with the skinny blonde. No specimen cups for him.

"Not only are we monogamous, we don't sleep with men," the skinny (blonde) one huffs. "This is not an option for us."

In the hunt for sperm, we're treated to the image of a man masturbating behind a screen, complete with back-lighting, while the women wait, eyes averted, on the other side of the divider. Whose idea of lesbian erotica is that? In my experience, straight men, not lesbians, fantasize about jerking off in front of a couple of women. And that's a big flaw of the show: It is aimed at straight men. The writers seem more intent on titillating men and assuaging the male ego than in portraying lesbians with dignity.

Shortly after telling one man that making a baby the old-fashioned way is "not an option," the skinny sisters

lazy leaden lying limited lugubrious lackluster lousy loo low-fat loutish loveless loopy lobotomized lithium limited lima beans lies

have a change of heart. They drag home a straight man who has been flirting with them. Stud-boy is offended in the middle of the no-strings-attached sex, though, when the women ask him not to wear a condom. He storms out, after accusing skinny blonde and skinny brunette—and all lesbians—of wanting only to steal sperm. The man is seen as having so much self-control that he'll walk away from the ultimate male fantasy. The lesbians are left humiliated.

Which lesbians are going to be entertained by seeing Southern California Sapphos throw themselves upon the mercy of men? I thought avoiding such degradation was one of the perks of lesbianism.

It's bad enough that lesbians are being tagged as sperm larcenists, but the writers rework an old stereotype, too. They take that standby about gay men in public restrooms and apply it to the lesbian experience.

Here's how it evolves: While these skinny lesbians are running around trying to separate men from their seed, the skinny straight woman next door has visions of vaginas

dancing in her head. It seems Jenny peeked through the fence and got an eye full of lesbian love



happening in the pool. Don't get too excited, though, girls. That glimpse of two naked skinny lesbians doesn't last nearly as long as a related scene. Later that night, Jenny describes the view for Tim, which of course spices up their foreplay. And the camera stays on them way too long—much longer than it lingered on the women in the pool—as they do the dirty hoola.

Then, suddenly, poor little straight-girl Jenny can't enter a bathroom without Marina trying to make out with her. The tennis player also kisses a relative stranger in a locker room. I know that it's not unheard of for women to lock lips in the loo, but after a few episodes you start thinking lesbians are lurking in every stall, waiting to pounce on straight women.

This is not groundbreaking TV. It's "Queer as Folk" with breasts. This sort of soft porn has been around for a long time and is more appealing to straight men than to any self-respecting feminist. Yet we're asked to embrace "The L Word" because it's about us. Hardly.

The weak writing, predictable plots and one-dimensional characters would be easy to dismiss except for one thing. Middle America—that vast portion of the population that thinks it doesn't know any gay people—might believe these newly-created lesbian stereotypes are true. And in an election year, that's dangerous. Conservatives are burning for a fight over gay rights. We're winning battles in the U.S. Supreme Court and in statehouses. Any gains we've enjoyed could be devastated by four more years of Bush. He will work extra hard to impose upon the nation

his narrow view of what defines a family. And his power will only grow if he's still in office when Supreme Court vacancies arise.

Shrub couldn't ask for a better political donation. In "The L Word" he's been handed the reincarnation of Willie Horton.

This pack of tall, slim lesbians is going to help Bush get re-elected because they will scare the crap out of Middle America. With fear stoked by extremists in the pulpits, Middle America will scramble for its checkbook and beg Shrub to keep their daughters safe from the leaping lesbians.

I wouldn't be surprised to see Bush buy ad time during "The L Word."

"Will your son be the next to suffer indignation at the hands of a victimizing, sperm-stealing lesbian?"

"Is your wife really at the grocery store, or does a pack of lesbians have her trapped in a restroom?"

"Are you scared? Good. Call Howard Dean and tell him you don't want the scourge of homosexuality to take over the nation."

I'm scared but not about the Democratic nominee, whoever it turns out to be. I'm afraid that lesbians, starved for any images of themselves on the small screen, will claim "The L Word" as a media victory. Such a victory is hollow and will be short-lived if Shrub wins this time. Four more years of the mess he's making will take a long time to clean up. ♦

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