

OUT, PROUD AND CHANGING THE WORLD

*Move over, Ellen. There's a new generation of diverse queer female role models. All hail, says **Lotte Jeffs***



For so long it was only Ellen DeGeneres. You'd be forgiven for thinking that the chino-wearing, inoffensively preppy chat-show host was the face, the voice, the everything of gay women

everywhere. And don't get me wrong, I love Ellen as much as the next lesbian, but there were few other celebrity pin-ups to choose from. Thank Sappho, then, that 2018 is shaping up to become the year a more diverse set of lesbian icons take centre stage. And I don't mean the usual suspects of spectacularly successful, high-profile "out" women such as Mary Portas, Clare Balding and Cressida Dick (though I, of course, send many handclap emojis to them). I mean that, finally, there is someone for black, butch, bi, teenage and working-mum queer women to look up to. Here is a triumvirate of cool, inspirational, out-and-proud women, who have emerged into the zeitgeist in a perfect planetary alignment, and who aren't just part of the social moment, they are owning it.

Step forward, Cynthia Nixon, lesbian mum, activist and *Sex and the City* stalwart turned candidate for governor of New York; Lena Waithe, the African-American, butch of centre Emmy-winning writer and actress, and current *Vanity Fair* cover star; and Emma Gonzalez, the 18-year-old survivor of the Parkland massacre and a leader of the March for Our Lives protest, who wore a Gays Against Guns badge on television.

There is a spectrum of identities that these three figureheads couldn't possibly represent, nor are they trying to. But it's the most intersectional that mainstream representations of gay women have been in my lifetime, and that is worth celebrating.

CYNTHIA NIXON

What's more likely? That SJP and Kim Cattrall will make up and head to Dubai on a gal-pal minibreak, or that Cynthia Nixon will be elected governor of New York in November? Nixon is #lesbianlifegoals for me, because when my wife gives birth in July, I too will be a busy working mum (with a similarly good collection of power suits). She has a seven-year-old son with her wife, an education activist, is a fierce campaigner herself and, by all accounts, is as much of a force to be reckoned with as the ball-breaking lawyer she played for so long on *Sex and the City*.

When Nixon was called an "unqualified lesbian" by an openly gay former city council speaker recently, she turned the insult into a slogan, put it on badges and now half of Brooklyn is wearing it on their vintage denim jackets. I love the fact that we now have a cool, 52-year-old gay woman in the spotlight — someone who used all her zeitgeisty kudos actually to make a difference. She has been married to a man and is now married to a woman, identifying as bisexual, with the caveat of not wanting to label her sexuality as anything at all really, which is confusing for many gay and straight people, but increasingly a truth for many of us. Thanks to Nixon, there is now a queer equivalent of Hillary's nasty women — here's to the rise of the unqualified lesbians!



LENA WAITHE

"For so many of us who have not seen an out black lesbian front and centre this way, her arrival is a small, long-awaited revelation. Her arrival is our arrival," writes Jacqueline Woodson, also a black gay woman, of 31-year-old Waithe in this month's issue of *Vanity Fair*. Waithe stars in *Ready Player One*, the new Spielberg blockbuster, though I first came across her as the laconic, snapback-wearing lesbian best friend (LBF?) in Netflix's *Master of None*. The episode she co-wrote with the show's co-creator, Aziz Ansari, which tells the story of her struggle to come out to her family, won Waithe an Emmy, and her new show, *The Chi* — currently



airing on Showtime in America — is critically acclaimed for its nuanced portrayal of the lives of black schoolchildren in the south side of Chicago. She's also bringing much-needed panache to androgynous red-carpet dressing in the form of gold print, black velvet and silver leaf-print tuxedos.

EMMA GONZALEZ

Gonzalez first captured our hearts when she interrupted speeches at a gun-control rally four days after 17 of her teachers and classmates were shot dead at a high school in Parkland, Florida, to "call BS" on "politicians who sit in their gilded House and Senate seats funded by the NRA". A month later, with the confidence of someone twice her age, she delivered a rousing speech at the March for Our Lives rally in Washington, and the world wept with her. The 18-year-old activist, who identifies as bisexual, is not, currently at least, speaking out on LGBTQ issues, but on an issue that affects all young people. When I was growing up, you only really saw gay people in the media when they were talking about being gay, as if who you fancied trumped everything else you might be interested in or affected by. But Gonzalez is telling queer kids everywhere that they have the right to use their voice and stand for something that matters to them. I'm jealous of the teenagers who get to have her picture on their bedroom wall. ■

