



Foster, Jodie (b. 1962)

by Victoria Shannon

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One of the most accomplished film actresses of her generation, Jodie Foster has been a glbtq icon for decades, though only recently has she acknowledged her lesbianism.

No other contemporary actress has generated as much interest in her personal life as Foster, an interest intensified by her steadfast refusal to discuss her private life in interviews. For years, with her lesbianism an open secret in the film industry, the gay press demanded--to no avail--that she come out publicly.

Foster's tomboyish roles as a child and her strong female protagonist roles as an adult fueled speculation as to her sexuality, especially among her numerous lesbian fans. Occasionally, pictures surfaced of Foster and her live-in companion for many years, producer Cydney Bernard, with Foster's children; and although the couple did not attend premieres or award shows together in the United States, they did so frequently in France. Moreover, in a couple of interviews, Foster spoke of her "partner" without explaining exactly what that role entailed.

In December 2007, at *Hollywood Reporter's* "Women in Entertainment" event, after accepting the Sherry Lansing Leadership Award, which recognized her prominence in the film industry, Foster finally acknowledged her partner of fifteen years, paying tribute to ". . . my beautiful Cydney who sticks with me through the rotten and the bliss."

The revelation surprised no one, and the enigmatic actress, director, and producer seemed unflustered by the publicity generated as a result of her apparent public coming out.

Foster became more forthcoming about her private life at another awards ceremony in 2013, when she more forthrightly acknowledged her homosexuality.

In April 2014, Foster married photographer Alexandra Hedison in a private ceremony, news of which was revealed only after the fact.

Early Life

Born November 19, 1962 in Los Angeles, Alicia Christian "Jodie" Foster started her career at age three in a television commercial for Coppertone as the result of a happy accident. Her mother, Brandy, had taken Buddy Foster, Jodie's older brother, to audition for the part, but when the producers saw Jodie, they fell in love with her. She soon became America's favorite child star, appearing in almost fifty commercials before her mother moved her into more serious roles.

Foster and her three siblings were raised by her single mother, Evelyn "Brandy" Ella Almond Foster. Her father, Lucius Fisher Foster III, a retired United States Air Force officer turned real estate broker, left his wife before Jodie was born.



Jodie Foster at the premiere of the film *The Brave One* in Berlin, Germany in 2007. Photograph by Franz Richter. Image appears under the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike license v. 2.5.

Foster's mother supported her family by working as a film producer. Foster's brother Buddy began appearing in commercials and television shows, helping to alleviate some of the family's financial strain, but when his career began to fade, Brandy Foster threw herself into managing Jodie's. She shrewdly guided her daughter's choice of roles and haunted the television and movie sets, provoking some to claim she that was exploiting her gifted daughter.

Foster, however, rejects the charge that she was exploited by her mother. She explained to a reporter, "My mom and I sit and talk about everything. That was our bond. That was our tie. It was all about staying within four walls and discussing things. So I haven't lived a normal life but I think I've lived a very healthy one."

In 1968, Foster debuted as a television actress in an episode of *Mayberry R.F.D.* She also appeared occasionally as Joey Kelly, Eddie's friend, on *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*.

In 1970, she made her film debut in the made-for-television movie *Menace on the Mountain*. In the 1970s, she also appeared in several Disney films, including *Napoleon and Samantha* (1972), *One Little Indian* (1973), *Freaky Friday* (1976), and *Candleshoe* (1977), and she starred with Christopher Connelly in the 1974 television series *Paper Moon*.

In 1976, she appeared with Martin Sheen in *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane*, directed by Nicholas Gessner, and hosted *Saturday Night Live* at the age of 14. In the same year, she was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actress for her breakthrough performance as a teenage prostitute in Martin Scorsese's film *Taxi Driver*. She also received two BAFTA awards (the British Oscars) in 1976: Best Newcomer and Best Supporting Actress for her roles in Alan Parker's musical *Bugsy Malone* and *Taxi Driver*.

In addition to acting, the teen-aged Foster also made appearances on the French pop music circuit, releasing two musical recordings in France in 1977.

Foster's allure as an actress comes from her versatility--her convincingness in a wide range of genres, from thrillers to science fiction movies, and her equal adeptness in comic and dramatic roles--and her uncanny ability to seemingly become the strong female characters she plays. Largely self-taught as an actress, she is not a "method actor" but she has an instinctual facility for living within her roles. One reason her performance playing a teenage prostitute in *Taxi Driver* was such a revelation was because, as she observed, "It was the first time anyone asked me to create a character who wasn't myself."

As a child actress, Foster's tomboyish demeanor and smart mouth endeared her to young girls, while directors nicknamed her "B.L.T."--bossy little thing-- because, from an early age, she was not shy about making suggestions if she thought something was not being done correctly on the set.

She was always clear about what she would and would not do in movies, and film professionals came to respect her even as a teenager. Her practical attitude towards film-making made her easy to work with, and her intelligence and dedication delighted directors. Her choice of strong female roles and her feminist beliefs as an adult enhanced her reputation for intelligence and political awareness, and have helped make her an icon in the gay community.

Yale Years

Despite a hectic acting career, Foster attended Lycée Français de Los Angeles, a demanding French-immersion prep school. She graduated in 1980 as valedictorian, and shocked the industry when she revealed that she intended to cut back on her career in order to attend Yale University to major in English literature.

She graduated magna cum laude from Yale in 1985.

While at Yale, Foster appeared in Tony Richardson's *The Hotel New Hampshire* (1984) and made several other appearances in films, including *The Blood of Others* (1984) directed by Claude Chabrol. In this film, she was the first American actress since Jane Fonda to dub her own part in French. She continues to dub her roles in the French-language versions of her films.

In 1981, while Foster was happily studying at Yale, a mentally disturbed man, John Warnock Hinckley, Jr., who was obsessed with Foster, attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan to impress her. He had tracked Foster down at Yale, sent her letters, and even managed to reach her on the telephone.

Following the assassination attempt, Foster found herself in the middle of a media frenzy, fielding questions from people who wanted to know everything about her private life. In 1982, Foster submitted a video-taped testimony at Hinckley's trial in which she stated, "I don't have any relationship with John Hinckley."

The incident frightened Foster badly, especially when another mentally disturbed man managed to appear in the audience at a play in which Foster was performing at Yale. Both stalkers had threatened to kill Foster, and she became fiercely protective of her privacy. To this day, she refuses to appear in interviews if she knows Hinckley is going to be mentioned. Her courage throughout the Hinckley ordeal further endeared her to the American public.

Adult Actor, Director, Producer

Foster was able to make a successful transition from child actor to adult actor, but not without some stumbles. After appearing in some financially unsuccessful movies, she was forced to audition for what proved to be her breakthrough role as an adult in Jonathan Kaplan's *The Accused* (1988).

In this movie, she plays a working-class woman who is gang-raped by several bar patrons while others cheer them on. With the help of an attorney played by Kelly McGillis, Foster's character successfully prosecutes the bystanders. Her critically-acclaimed performance earned Foster her first Academy Award for Best Actress and her first Golden Globe Award.

In 1992, Foster again won both an Oscar and a Golden Globe Award for Best Actress for her portrayal of an FBI agent who seeks help from a serial killer, Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), to find another serial killer in Jonathan Demme's suspenseful *The Silence of the Lambs*. The film caused an uproar in the gay community because the serial killer Buffalo Bill was portrayed as a homosexual pervert. Gay militants picketed the Oscars and demanded that Foster come out of the closet.

In 1992 Foster founded Egg Pictures, a production company dedicated to producing independent films. The two-time Oscar winner had become an influential force in Hollywood, and she turned her attention to directing and producing. Her first directorial efforts, aside from some episodic television, were the critically acclaimed drama *Little Man Tate* (1991), in which she starred as the mother of a child prodigy, and the black comedy *Home for the Holidays* (1995) about an eccentric family featuring Holly Hunter and Robert Downey, Jr. in a large and distinguished cast.

Among the films that Foster has produced are Michael Apted's *Neil* (1994), in which she earned an Academy Award nomination and a Screen Actors Guild Award for her portrayal of a young woman who has been raised by her mother in an isolated cabin; *Home for the Holidays* (1995); Peter Care's *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (2002), in which she plays a nun; and Neil Jordan's *The Brave One* (2007), in which she earned a Golden Globe nomination for her depiction of a vigilante.

It was on the set of John Amiel's *Somersby* (1992), in which she plays the wife of a Civil War veteran who returns after a long absence, that she met Cydney Bernard.

Other recent films featuring Foster include such box office successes as Robert Zemeckis' *Contact* (1997) and Spike Lee's *Inside Man* (2006). She continues to pursue an active career as performer, director, and producer.

The Trevor Project

Although Foster for many years refused to discuss her private life, never responding to rumors about her sexual orientation, she was nevertheless a major contributor to The Trevor Project, a telephone counseling service for glbtq young people founded by Foster's close friend, the late Randy Stone, who served as executive producer of the Foster-directed film *Little Man Tate* in 1991.

In 1994, Foster was the first major donor to provide support for the short film *Trevor*, a film about a teenager who attempts suicide after realizing he might be gay. The film, directed by Peggy Rajski who co-produced it with Stone, won an Academy Award for live-action short film in 1995. When accepting the award, Stone pointed at Foster in the audience and said, "Jodie, I love you."

In 2007, Foster presented The Trevor Founders Award to screenwriter James Lescasne and director Peggy Rajski at the organization's Cracked Xmas event, and accepted the award posthumously on behalf of Randy Stone. She also kicked off the campaign to establish The Randy Stone Call Center by contributing the largest gift in the organization's history.

Conclusion

Foster has two sons, Charles Bernard Foster (b. 1998) and Kit Bernard Foster (b. 2001). For some 15 years, she lived in Los Angeles with Cydney Bernard. On May 15, 2008, however, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that Foster had ended her relationship with Bernard after Foster had an affair with Cynthia Mort, a screenwriter for *The Brave One*.

As usual, however, Foster remained silent about the press accounts of her break-up with Bernard.

But on January 13, 2013, when she received the Cecil B. DeMille lifetime achievement award at the Foreign Press Association's Golden Globes Awards show, Foster used the occasion to announce an evolution in her career and also to discuss her personal life, her famous love of privacy, and the complexities of coming out.

As Diane Anderson-Minshall observes in *The Advocate*, "The speech began a bit like a light-hearted comic interlude but was actually a serious and thoughtful combination of a coming out speech and a retirement goodbye."

After joking about her famous reluctance to discuss her personal life and coming out as . . . "single," Foster talked seriously about the nuances of coming out and her need for privacy. In doing so, she obliquely acknowledged the criticism she has received from some activists for her reticence.

"I hope you're not disappointed that there won't be a big coming-out speech tonight, because I already did my coming out about a thousand years ago back in the stone age in those very quaint days when a fragile young girl would open up to trusted friends and family, and co-workers and then gradually, proudly to everyone who knew her, to everyone she actually met."

Foster emphasized that she has not spent her life in the closet, that in fact in "real life" she has been out for a very long time.

"But now," she continued, "apparently I'm told that every celebrity is expected to honor the details of their private life with a press conference, a fragrance, and a prime-time reality show. You guys might be surprised, but I am not Honey Boo Boo child. No, I'm sorry that's just not me, never was, and it never will be. . . . But seriously, if you had been a public figure from the time that you were a toddler. If you had to fight for a life that felt real and honest and normal against all odds, then maybe then you too would value privacy above all else--privacy. . . . I have given everything up there from the time I was 3 years old. That's reality show enough, don't you think?"

She went on to acknowledge Cydney Bernard, her former partner with whom she co-parents two sons: "There is no way I could ever stand here without acknowledging one of the deepest loves of my life, my heroic co-parent, my ex-partner in love but righteous soul sister in life, my confessor, chief buddy, consigliere, [and] most beloved BFF of 20 years, Cydney Bernard. Thank you Cyd."

She added, "I am so proud of our modern family, our amazing sons Charlie and Kit, who are my reason to breathe and to evolve, my blood and soul. And boys in case you didn't know it, this song, all of this, this song is for you."

She concluded by hinting that her career as an actress may be over, but "from now on I may be holding a different talking stick... maybe it won't open on 3,000 screens, maybe it'll be so quiet and delicate that only dogs can hear it whistle, but it will be my writing on the wall: Jodie Foster was here. I still am. And I want to be seen, to be understood deeply, and to be not so very lonely."

While her speech was first interpreted to mean that she was retiring, she clarified later in an interview with Seth Abramovitch of the *Hollywood Reporter* that she meant to indicate only that her career was evolving and that she may spend more time directing.

In accepting the Sherry Lansing Award for Leadership in the film industry in 2007, Foster remarked that she did not feel very powerful. "I feel fragile . . . unsure, struggling to figure it all out, trying to get there even though I'm not sure where there is." She even described herself as "nutty as a fruitcake."

Still, as one of the few women in Hollywood who is considered a "bankable star," as well as an accomplished director and producer, Foster occupies a singular place in commercial film.

Having won two Academy Awards, two Golden Globe Awards, and a Screen Actors Guild Award, Foster would seem to have nothing left to prove, yet she is likely to continue to develop in interesting and perhaps unpredictable ways as a filmmaker.

In April 2014, Foster married accomplished photographer Alexandra Hedison, a former actress and former girlfriend of Ellen DeGeneres. Foster and Hedison had been a couple for about a year before they wed.

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