

gillian jacobs

Our Chelsea enclave is always pleased to welcome a kindred spirit to our pages. Ms. Jacobs only adds to our growing body of evidence that Hollywood has its fair share of the grey matter.

by Sylvia Karcz

photography by Tyler Shields

Actress Gillian Jacobs is all about measured risk, so it makes perfect sense that she is currently doing something that she has never quite done before: a comedy series. For the instinctively witty and all-around fizz-pop-natured Gillian, such a move was bound to happen eventually. Nonetheless, as someone who has made playing the likes of strippers, street prostitutes, child-abductees, drug-addicts, and other vulnerable souls somewhat the norm, the present career shift is a much-welcomed move which shows the promise that resonates from such chameleon-esque variation. And even though the 28-year-old Pittsburgh native may be a self-professed "worrier" who refuses to take her ranking as one of acting's new breed of talented performers for granted, if the past few years are any testament of what Gillian is capable of achieving in the future, she should not have much to worry about at all.

From her days as rambunctious kid with a passion for reading children's versions of Shakespeare plays — "I was a little dramatic, as my mother might say" — to a Juilliard graduate



"We're in a time of change right now with our health care system, and I have a lot of hope that it will improve and that there will be more democratized health care in this country..."

quickly hailed as a standout thanks to her New York City theatre performances, Gillian has quickly learned that the ability to transform into different characters and adapt to different scripts is a very important asset, both on and off the screen. "Sometimes it's fun to do a part that you're not quite sure you can pull off – something that you may think is beyond your ability – and you can push yourself to see if you can do it. And then it's also fun to just be really silly sometimes," she says of the roles she has chosen thus far in her young career. "Your approach as an actor is sort of similar for both. But I haven't had to research any more drugs or fake heroin in a while."

Luckily, though, it is Gillian's current role as Britta Perry on NBC's series, *Community*, that is taking the actress to a bit more of a relatable, normal, and, yes, funnier place. "I definitely think there are things that Britta and I agree on, 100%. I like the dryness of her sense of humor, her sarcasm. And I think I relate to her attempt to be a good person."

Throughout all of the varying experiences from her past and current productions there is one aspect of acting that Gillian will remain eternally vital: choosing characters and being part of projects that are of value. The first TV role she ever got was in an NBC drama called *The Book of Daniel*, about an "unconventional" Christian family. The show was deemed so controversial that it was canceled shortly after airing for the first time. "The people protesting it had never even seen it," she says. "So the uproar started before the first episode even aired."

Gillian remains optimistic that in spite of such happenings, the present state of television and filmmaking has indeed come a long way, and major headway is being made, for the most part, in terms of showing a greater variety of real people in real scenarios. "Whatever role that you have, in film or theatre, you are being part of this discourse of society and life; it's important to address issues," she says. "But it may not always be the proper place. Or it might not be the right time. Or sometimes, it's just not the right atmosphere, due to the network, or what's going on in the world in general, or the subject matter of the show. I do think that there are a lot of shows on television that are addressing families in a realistic way and that have complicated characters."

And while Gillian is quick to state that, ideally, she would like there to be a greater number of female filmmakers and directors in the industry, it is equally critical to encourage the talented women that are currently in the business to continually produce as many works as possible, so they themselves can grow as artists. "There's a movie like *The Kids Are All Right*. It's made by a female film-

maker, with two women over forty [Annette Bening and Julianne Moore] playing leads, and they are women you can recognize and sympathize with and who frustrate you all at the same time. It's real living, and it's really exciting." Gillian then considers the alternative. "Then, of course, movies can range all the way back to stereotype and caricature. I think there are strong years, when there are five or six parts which are absolutely dynamite, and then other years, where it's hard to find a film in which you wish you had that part. But I think that as long as there are amazing actresses out there working, then hopefully they will continue to find parts and people will realize that audiences want to pay money to see women in film."

Gillian's insight and awareness of our culture's most pressing issues extend far past the television screen. From world health to poverty and health care in the United States, Gillian has a keen understanding of the imminent changes that must be tackled in order to cement a promising future. "We're in a time of change right now with our health care system, and I have a lot of hope that it will improve and that there will be more democratized health care in this country," she comments on the ongoing transformation which has most recently been at the forefront of our nation's politics. "Because it's pretty bleak when you don't have health coverage. I'm hopeful that the situation will continue to improve."

Furthermore, as a self-proclaimed "book-worm" who strongly supports education in all respects, Gillian is a firm believer that public education ("giving funding and support to teachers, reducing class sizes") and adult literacy in America should be receiving far more attention. "I mean, literacy is pretty essential to being a fully participating member of society."

And unlike the character she plays on *Community*, there is no doubt that Gillian's desire to be as knowledgeable and altruistic an individual as possible is very much a reality, and one that comes matched with a genuine humility and appreciation. "There are more worthy causes than there are hours in the day or weeks or year, and I'm very grateful for the people out there who dedicate their lives to combating these issues," Gillian says. "I feel very grateful for the life that I have, and I hope to find a way to give back in a meaningful way in the future."

Until then, though, Gillian is sure to continue pleasing and surprising audiences with many more laughs. "Or maybe an ice hockey movie, so I would have to force myself to learn how to ice skate. I find it terrifying. So I want to do *Slapshot Two*. And then I could learn how to ice skate." Now how is that for measured risk?

Kimberly Ovitz dress
boots stylist's own!

photography Tyler Shieles
stylist Caroline Watson @opusbeauty
hair Lauren Andersen @thewallgroup
makeup Daniel Howell @traceymattingly