

BUT WE STILL END UP DEAD: EFFECTS OF MAINSTREAM HOLLYWOOD
FILM ON QUEER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
of
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Statement of Problem

Queer youth are killing themselves at a rate three times as great as their non-Queer counterparts are. There are many possible reasons for this disparity; the one identified here is the effect of mainstream Hollywood's film portrayal of Queer characters. Queer youth tend to be more isolated and in need of positive role models than are non-Queer youth. The stereotypical portrayals of Queers in Hollywood film do not provide such models. Historically, in many films the Queer character, who is rarely a hero, ends up dead before the end of the film; sometimes at the hand of another, or from disease but most often by his her own hand.

Sources of Data

Questionnaires were distributed to 35 adult individuals primarily, within the greater Sacramento area, 27 were returned and analyzed. In addition, five participants were contacted requesting supplement dialogue. Three individuals were able to participate in the additional conversations. Both the questionnaires and the dialogue focused on the influence the participant felt film had in their identity development as Queer people.

Although the concern of this study is the prevalence of Queer youth suicide, adults were used in this study due to the problems associated in finding an adequate sample of Queer youth. The adults were asked to reflect on early films viewed and the feeling generated by those films.

Conclusions Reached

The responses from the participants while not conclusive, build a strong case for the negative effect seeing demeaning and deadly portrayals of Queer people in film had on the self-image of these Queer respondents.

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DEDICATION

I dedicated this thesis to my Queer family, past, present, and most of all, future.

May you find positive, affirming Queer images on the big screen that support the wonder of being your complete self in the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been very fortunate in my educational journey here at Sacramento State University, having been supported, encouraged, and mentored by excellent professors in a variety of department. I would be remiss if I did not mention some of the most remarkable ones. My thanks go out to them all and especially, Julie López Figueroa of the Ethnic Studies Department, Melinda Wilson of the Department of Theatre and Dance, Ju Hui Park of the Department of Psychology. In addition, the professors in my own department of Bilingual Multicultural Education are thanked for sharing their time and expertise, particularly, Lisa William-White, Albert Lozano and my wonderful advisor, Margarita Berta-Ávila. Most of all, I need to acknowledge my friend, mentor and second reader, Roberto Pomo, Professor of Theatre and Film and Director of the Honors Program, whose encouragement and friendship has been and continues to be, invaluable.

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The many respondents who took the time to answer the questions on the questionnaire have my appreciation, as does the one I cannot name due to concerns about participant anonymity. Therefore, you who must be nameless, thank you so much for procuring all the completed questionnaires. Your contribution made this a deeper, richer thesis.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

Personal Narrative

Film, mainstream Hollywood film, is perceived as a form of entertainment and as a business, but films are so much more. It is through media, particularly television and film that we learn how to be in the world and who to perceive as the “other” (Kellner, 2003). This thesis begins with a personal story that is a melding of the influence of film and my identity development, because as a child the movies held a special fascination for me. The year was 1955, and McCarthyism was fighting not only communism, but also sexual “perversion”. Gay and lesbian people who were federal employees were being fired because they were security risks; they were considered to be easy targets for blackmail (Faderman, 1991). This was the political atmosphere in which I realized at the age of eleven, that I was a lesbian. It was an identity that I fought against for the next twenty years. The cause of this particular identity crisis was not just fear of being unemployable, but also the messages I was receiving from media. There were no homosexual people to be found out and about in my small town of Indio, California. There were no homosexual people to be found on radio, or television, or in the movies. However, reading our small town daily newspaper I learned what a “pervert” was, what happened to them, and why. As Robert Corber (2011) affirms, “The scholarship often stresses that during the antihomosexual witch hunts of the 1950s; more lesbians and gays were expelled

from the federal government than suspected communists (p.29)". It was not just the media that told me being Queer was bad but also my very liberal mother who at some point told me, "Homosexuals are perverts, child molesters and exhibitionists, and you will have nothing to do with them". As a dutiful daughter, I knew that being one just was not an option.

It was with a guilty fascination that I continued to look for images of Queer people living around me, but especially in the movies. However, the 1950s were a different time and the depiction of homosexuality was one of the things outlawed by the Motion Picture Production Codes (Russo, 1987). My memory tells me it was only a few years after my awakening to my sexual identity that I was finally able to see my own feared image on the screen. In fact, it was 1962 when the movie *The Children's Hour* was released, one of two films that year which discussed homosexuality. A brief summation of the plot: two women running a boarding school which includes a student who lies about the relationship between the women causing all of the parents to remove their children, which in turn ruins the school and the lives of the women. Martha, realized that she does have feelings for her partner, she confesses, stating how "dirty and disgusting" she feels and then hangs herself. This scene of Martha's confession and suicide reinforced my internalized homophobia. My mother was obviously right and I really did not want to be one of those. The message I received from this movie was a fear of my own queerness and a belief that should I act on my lesbianism, I would end up killing myself. It would be at least another eleven years until I was able to move past my first coming out and tell another person that I believed I was a lesbian. Those eleven plus

years were filled with internalized homophobia which in my case manifested itself in self-destructive behavior, specifically, isolation, self-loathing, fear of discovery, and suicidal thoughts.

Today, when I see any part of *The Children's Hour* I wonder what might have been if I had not internalized the film's very negative message about what it meant to be Queer? I also question how many other Queer youth had similar experiences. One of the things that attract viewers to film is the reflection of people and lives similar to our own. It is with this starting point that this thesis will look at the influence of film on the identity development of Queer youth.

Identity Development

It is through the process of identity development that an individual begins asking and more importantly answering the question 'who am I and what is my place in the world'? There has been extensive writing done on the formation of identity development. Beginning with psychologist Erik Erikson's *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) an emphasis has been placed on the effects of the environment, including but not limited to the family, friends and the media, on the stages of development. Because of the particularly capricious time that is adolescences, this phase in a person's life has been the focus of extensive attention. As Erikson's eight stages of life were based on the work of Sigmund Freud (1938), so too have others identified the stages of identity development for defined sub-groups. Specifically, William Cross, in 1971 formulated stages for African Americans which he identified as the psychology of Nigrescence, which became *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (1991). In the realm of

homosexual identity formation, Vivienne Cass (1979, 1984), developed and then tested a six stage model. In all of the above examples, the individual begins questioning his/her identity through interaction with the environment. Without others to compare with this questioning might not occur. This is of particular importance in the formation of a Queer identity; due to the homophobic nature of our culture, only this identity development tends to happen in isolation, without the benefit of family friends, and even positive models in the media.

Henri Tajfel (1981) has written extensively on the effects of social group identity and self-esteem (Jones, 2002). We, as humans, are always looking for our own image to be reflected back to us in society at large, and also in the media. How we see ourselves portrayed has a strong influence on how we feel about ourselves. As Douglas Kellner (2003) points out while writing on media's influence:

Radio, television, film, and the other products of media culture provides materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, our ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of 'us' and 'them' (p. 9).

For minority populations, particularly during the middle of the twentieth century, finding the image of self in the media was difficult and when the image was found, it was usually distorted. In the 1950s, this was a problem not only for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered youth (here after included under the umbrella term,

Queer), but also for people of color. What is the effect on one's development when the media repeatedly presents images with which one cannot identify?

The difference between the search for identity in a Queer youth and a youth of color would be the family; the youth of color usually has family and often friends who share their identity. So at home, or perhaps at school, there are others who look like you. For a Queer youth, at least up until the Stonewall rebellion, there were few images to be found and even fewer positive images. Talking with family or friends about a possible Queer identity was a risky behavior with major potential negative consequences. In both the United States and Canada, van Wormer and Mc Kinney (2003), state our schools are an extremely toxic environment for youth suspected of a Queer identity; while studies have found that over one fourth of youth who come out to family are then forced to leave. The value of silence as to one's identity can be seen when contrasted to the potential problems of coming out; but without role models or someone to talk with, how do members of the non-dominant culture learn how to perform their identity?

The concept that identity is performance is most often associated with the name of theorist and Professor Judith Butler (1990, 1993). In her work, she has influenced feminist theory and Queer theory with the idea that we learn and then perform our identities as our culture dictates. Building on the philosophy of Butler, theorist Riki Wilchins (2004) asks the question, "Is all minority identity a kind of learning, anchored not just in bodies and culture but in process of imitation and the performance of who we're supposed to be" (p.116)? I would suggest that all identity is learned, the problem in learning, comes from a lack of models when one is not a member of the dominant culture.

The idea of a heteronormative society suggests that there is only one sexual orientation: heterosexual, and there are only two possible expressions of gender, male and female (Hanlon, 2009). For Queer people, these models are problematic. The images found in media, in this thesis restricted to those found in mainstream Hollywood film, are infrequent and when present are seldom positive.

Identity and Film

In his excellent book, *The Celluloid Closet*, (1987) Queer activist Vito Russo explores the history of the Queer in mainstream Hollywood film. One of the earliest images found on film, produced by Thomas Edison, shows two men waltzing together. Although the intent of this film clip is unknown, it is considered as the first Queer American film image. With the advent of silent films intended for distribution, the image of the effeminate male or 'sissy' began appearing as a form of comedy. The stereotypical mannerism of the sissy (i.e. the limp wrist and effeminate walk, to name just two examples) continued into talking films and can still be found in cinema today. During the 1930s, the films of Greta Garbo added a perceived lesbian undercurrent to Hollywood productions. It was also during this time that conservative elements in the United States began to pressure Congress to do something about the 'decadence' being portrayed in film. By 'decadence', they meant many types of behavior, but behavior that could be perceived as Queer was considered most egregious. It was in response to this pressure that the film industry began their self-censoring under the Motion Picture Production Code also known as the Hays Code. With the advent of the Code, homosexuality became hidden in film, still present but now suggested rather than spoken. An example of this

would be the character of Plato in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955). It is never said that he is Queer but his attachment to Jim and his having a photograph of actor Alan Ladd hanging in his school locker indicates the marginality to this character. It is also worthy of notation that Plato dies at the conclusion of the film; this means of dealing with the ‘marginalized other’ is a recurring theme in classic Hollywood cinema (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009).

It was 1962 with *The Children’s Hour* and *Advise and Consent* that stated homosexuality escaped the censors and again became subject matter for mainstream film. Since *The Children’s Hour* reintroduced the Queer into mainstream Hollywood cinema one might be tempted to see the suicide of the Martha as an anomaly. However, this is not the case, as Vito Russo (1987) points out in *The Celluloid Closet*; the 1960s began as a time when Queers in the films had to die. He states, “Once homosexuality had become literally speakable in the early 1960s, gays dropped like flies, usually by their own hand; in twenty-two of twenty- eight films dealing with gay subjects from 1962 to 1978, major gay characters onscreen ended in suicide or violent death” (p. 52). The fact that 22 of 28 is closer to 80% than a 100% does not lessen the potential effect of seeing Queers in films dying has on the self-esteem of the Queer viewer, especially one who may be struggling with his/her sexual identity.

The portrayal of Queers was not much better in the decade of the 1980s, as sociologist Steven Seidman points out:

Hollywood film of the 1970’s and 1980’s acknowledge the reality of homosexuals but represent them either as harmless but freakish and pathetic

figure as in *Car Wash* or as serious physical, moral and social threats think of *Sudden Impact*. These films view heterosexuality and homosexuality as mutually exclusive social identities. This is a moral division: the heterosexual represents a pure and good human status in contrast to the impure and dangerous homosexual. Accordingly, homosexuals must be excluded from the public world of visible, open communication by means of repressive strategies such as censorship, civic disenfranchisement, and sequestration. (2002, p. 132)

It is this binary world view, which according to Seidman creates the closet in which the Queer, he identifies as the “polluted homosexual” often lives. The tools of exclusion he refers to can be seen in the following examples: censorship using the Production code, prohibiting the explicit showing of non-heterosexuals; disenfranchisement most recently seen in California with Proposition 8 limiting marriage to man and a woman; or sequestration as in Queer ghettos such as Greenwich Village in New York, West Hollywood or Midtown Sacramento.

It was not until the 1990s that Queers would be normalized by Hollywood. Yet, even when normalized, at the final frame of the film the main Queer character is often dead. Recent examples would be the Academy Award winning *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Milk* (2008) or the Academy Award nominated *A Single Man* (2009). What is the subliminal message that the audience receives from the continual deaths of the Queer characters? What effect does this have on audiences both Queer and straight?

Statement of Problem and Research Questions

Queer identity formation happens primarily outside the family of origin and is negatively impacted by heteronormative society, including the media. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24 (CDC, 2007) and it is estimated that Queer youth, in that age group are three times more likely to commit suicide than their non-Queer peers (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005, Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006). This study uses narrative inquiry to consider how mainstream Hollywood films negatively affect the identity formation in Queer youth; considering factors such as internalized homophobia and suicide. This research will examine:

- 1- How do Queer youth develop their Queer identity?
- 2- Do mainstream Hollywood films influence the identity development of Queer youth?
- 3- Could the high rate of Queer youth suicide be related to the negative Queer images seen in mainstream Hollywood films?
- 4-Is there a relationship between imitative suicide and film?
- 5- Since the Stonewall Rebellion, have mainstream Hollywood films presented more positive Queer images?

Limitations

Due to the use of narrative inquiry, the voices reflected in this research are those of the participants and may not reflect the experience of other Queer people. In addition, the people interviewed were all United States citizens and primarily-of European background. Although attempts were made for a reasonable sample of people, the number

used in this study is limited and therefore, the stories can by no means be representative of all Queer people in the United States. It is obvious that the stories from people of different cultures will reflect those cultural norms and vary from the narratives presented here.

Additionally, many of the questions being asked in this study are subject to conjecture and may not be answerable; however, they are important questions to ponder nonetheless.

Importance of Research

One suicide is one too many, the fact that Queer youth kill themselves at a rate at least three times that of their non-Queer peers is unacceptable. Due to the stigma attached to homosexuality in this country little is known as to the factors contributing to this suicide rate. Research which sheds some light on the problem and possible causation is important to the protection of this group. As stated above, the Center for Disease Control states that the third leading cause of death in young people ages 15 to 24 (CDC, 2007) is suicide.

Theoretical Framework

Queer theory will be used as the lens for this paper. Queer theory is defined as a theory used by Queer and non-Queer scholars to signify the fluidity and non-binary nature of sexual orientation. "Queer theory questions the traditional ideas of normal and deviant by arguing against the taken-for-granted notion that there are only two genders, male and female" (Dines & Humez, 2003, p.xv). Queer theory is particularly used to call into question notions about sexuality and gender in literature, music and cinema. (Kirsch,

2000) A corollary to Queer theory would be Queer cinema which is an additional theoretical framework for this paper.

While viewing the data through Queer theory, personal narrative was utilized in this research. Data was collected through questionnaires, individual interviews and focus groups. Throughout the process, the intent was to allow, as much as possible, the voices of an underrepresented group to be heard.

Definition of Terms

The Code

The Motion Picture Production Code or Hays Code existed from 1934 until it was discarded in 1968 in favor of the current rating system. Its function was to make Hollywood motion pictures acceptable to the country's moral guardians. The Code employed censors to insure the wholesomeness of movies and was a self-policing activity chosen by the major studios over censorship imposed from the outside. There were many items which the Code prohibited, including a husband and wife sleeping in the same bed, and over time fewer and fewer of these restrictions were enforced. However, the last item to escape the censorship of the Code was the depiction of homosexuality in 1962. (Russo, 1987).

Coming Out

This term reflects an ongoing rite of passage in the lives of Queer people. To come out is to first recognize oneself as Queer and then begin the process (or not) of sharing that information with others. The mental process is encountered with every new person met and in most social situations. It includes asking oneself one or more questions, such as:

- Is it safe?
- What is this person's need to know?
- What possible good can come from coming out?
- What possible harm can come from it?
- Do I have the time, energy and or inclination to come out here and now?

The coming out process is thought of in connection to Queer people but is experienced by others who have a hidden diversity (Rust, 1996).

Heteronormative

The assumption, belief, and behavior that being and acting heterosexual is the norm, the only natural way of being, and is the only way any person can live his/her life. (Hanlon, 2009)

Homophobia

Literally, homo- referring to same sex and -phobia meaning fear of; it is commonly defined as prejudice against people who are not of the dominant sexual orientation, i.e. heterosexual. The terms heterosexism and homonegativity are also used interchangeably with homophobia, while Herke breaks down the concept further by discussing sexual stigma (Herke, Gillis, and Cogan, 2009). The reactive behavior to such people can range from simple avoidance to perpetration of hate crimes. Homophobia is also discussed as *internalized homophobia* which is the internalizing of this prejudice by members of the stigmatized group (Blumenfeld, 1992).

Imitative Suicide

Expanding on the work of Emile Durkheim (1857) who first purposed a causation of imitation in suicides, David P. Phillips in 1974 began publishing on the increase of suicidal behavior following a well-publicized suicide, specifically, a suicide published as front page news in a large newspaper such as the New York Times. Others, in support of the imitative nature of suicide, have studied the effect of television, videos and rock music on young men's suicidal idealization. (Bollen & Phillips, 1982; Phillips, 1974; Rustad, Small, Jobes, Safer, & Peterson, 2003)

Mainstream Hollywood Film

This phrase refers to movies that are released to multiple theatres for showing. In the past mainstream Hollywood film was heavily connected to the studio system where the studio, for example Warner Brothers, owned the rights to use particular stars, writers and directors; owned and produced the film; and, finally, owned the theatres in which the films were shown. The term is used to differentiate the more commercial film from independent cinema, which tends to be less commercial, more experimental and harder to find due to limited distribution (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009).

Narrative Inquiry

This is a form of qualitative research found in education and social science, using the voices of the participants to tell their own stories. The methods used include case history and interview and have a basis in the ethnographic research of anthropology. (Chase, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2006)

Queer

This identifier is used in this paper for several reasons. First, it has been a pejorative term used to denigrate non-heterosexual people; and the term is now being reclaimed by the oppressed groups to be used with pride. The use of Queer by its members is much like the use of Chicano by some Latinos, that is, it is an identifier with political connotations. (Raymond, 2003) Secondly, it is a handy umbrella term used to cover a wide variety of people, e.g., bisexual, gay, lesbian, questioning, transgendered, two-spirited, to name some of the most commonly used terms; or in other words, the use of Queer covers everyone who is not a member of the dominant sexual orientation. Finally, the use of the term aligns with Queer theory, which is a supporting tenet of this research (Stewart, 1995).

Straight

The common slang term used to identify people who are not Queer, i.e. heterosexual (Stewart, 1995).

This thesis consists of the following component parts: the introduction. In chapter two is a discussion of how a Queer identity is developed, an analysis of the influence of film on that identity development, and an exploration of the possible relationship between Queer portrayals in film and imitative suicides in Queer youth. The methodology will be explored in chapter three where narrative inquiry derived data from questionnaires, and interviews of people who identify as Queer and who had an emotional reaction to film portrayals of Queer characters. The fourth chapter analyzes the data generated by the narrative inquiry and allows the voices of Queer people to be heard in their experience

with Queer characters on the screen. The fifth chapter revisits the research questions in light of the data to ascertain the effect mainstream Hollywood film has on Queer identity development.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This thesis questions the effect that mainstream Hollywood film has on the identity development of Queer youth; particularly asking, is there any correlation between the negative images of Queer characters on the movie screen to the disproportionate high rate of suicides among Queer youth? There is no literature to either support or refute this claim; therefore, the literature reviewed in this section covers a variety of topics in the belief that the cumulative effect supports the hypothesis.

Consequently, the following topics are discussed in this literature review:

Homophobia/Internalized Homophobia; Queer Theory and Queer film theory; Identity Formation in youth, including youth of color and Queer youth; Suicide, particularly the concepts of Queer youth suicide and imitative suicide; and finally the discussion of mainstream American film as it portrays Queer characters. Of these five main topics the first two which discuss homophobia/internalized homophobia and the topic on Queer theory are important to setting the overall framework for the more specific topics which follow. Homophobia/internalized homophobia is the overriding social construction that influences the totality of this discussion. Queer theory, on the other hand, is the counterpoint; the theoretical framework which includes Queers as a part of this society. In fact, Queer theory goes from inclusion to questioning are not all of us queer in some regard?

The real substance of the thesis resides in the literature on Queer identity formation, Queer youth suicide and the corollary imitative suicide which has been researched in relations to youth but never specifically to Queer youth, and the impact of mainstream Hollywood film on how people perceive themselves. Finally, the section on film will discuss the portrayal of the Queer character.

It is accepted by many sources (CDC, 2008; Kulkin, Chauvin & Percle, 2000; Walls, Freedenthal & Wisneski, 2008) that Queer youth kill themselves at a rate that is three times greater than their non-Queer counterparts are. It is assumed by many researchers (D'Augelli, et al., 2005; Kulkin, et al., 2000; Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott, 2008) that the reasons for this great disparity in suicide rates is impacted by several factors, including: homophobia/heterosexism, isolation, and a systemic lack of support for a marginalized sexual orientation. How one negotiates a Queer identity against these odds caused Brady and Busse, 1994 ; Cass, 1979 & 1984; and Troiden, 1989, amongst others to consider how a Queer identity is formed. Identity formation does not happen in a vacuum and for an individual to come to his/her full authentic self requires support from public as well as private institutions, positive role models, and a belief that a positive outcome is possible for oneself. Consequently this literature review looks at the structural issues of homophobia/heterosexism, the process of identity formation for young people of the dominant culture as well as the marginalized groups, the additional stress factors which may lead a Queer youth to thoughts and/or actions of suicide. Two related concepts are discussed, the first being the concept of imitative suicide and the second being the media influence, particularly cinema, on an imitative

suicidal idealization. Finally, it should be stated that there is no one reason for all suicidal behavior and film is a probably a minor contributing factor, but it can be a factor none the less, when Queer youth are stressed by all of the non-supportive factors in their lives what does it mean when the role model they see on the cinema screen most often ends up dead by the end of the film?

Homophobia

The literature on homophobia often begins with a discussion of the inadequacy of the term (Dermer, Smith & Barto, 2010; Herek, 1985, 1998, 2000, 2004; Maher et al., 2009). These authors suggest other terms which could be used, such as: antigay hostility, antihomosexual, gayism, heterocentrism, hetronormativity, heterosexism, homonegativity, homoprejudice, sexual prejudice, and sexual stigma, (Dermer, et.al., 2010, Maher et al., 2009; Tollerud & Slabon, 2009); however, for the purpose of this study, while recognizing the validity of the view on the limitations of the term homophobia, it will continue to be used here.

The term is inadequate because of the prefix - *phobia* which means fear and fear is too simple, often inaccurate, and too limited a concept to describe the multiple negative feelings that a Queer identity may engender in both the Queer self and others. An additional limitation to the term is raised by Herek (2004) in his discussion of the literature and a narrowing of the term to include only homosexual males. He points out that heterosexual males react differently to lesbians than they do to gay men; and he agrees with Adrienne Rich that the “oppression of lesbians is qualitatively different from the oppression of gay men” (1980, p. 21). Since the role sexism plays in homophobia is

beyond the scope of this study; the truth of Herek's statement will be accepted and the term homophobia will still be used for prejudice against both Queer genders. It is a term which is generally understood to mean prejudice and or discrimination toward Queer people (Dermer, et al., 2010; Herek, 2004); and more importantly there is no agreement on what term of the multitude listed above should be used as a replacement.

This discussion of the literature on homophobia will begin by following Maher et al., (2009) in describing a brief history of the treatment of and prejudice against Queers in the societal United States context. Interwoven in the historical context are the theoretical voices of the Queer theorists who question what it is Queer people want and need from society. The discussion then, progress to consider the work of Herek (1985, 1998, 2000, 2004) and others (Dermer, et al., 2010; DiPlacido, J. 1998; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Smith, S.D., 2010) on homophobia and sexual stigma which incorporates the institutional aspects of homophobia. The final section, will consider the effects of homophobia on the Queer individual under the rubric, internalized homophobia.

Maher et al. (2009) published an article containing a three part review of empirical research on Queers, discussing the change in attitudes on what homosexuality was. The time period from the late 19th century until the present day was compartmentalized into three phases: phase one, "Late 1800s to 1972: Disease, treatments, prevalence and causes" (p. 924); phase two, "1972 to 1990: Homophobia and being GLBT" (p.926); and, phase three, "Early 1990s to current: Action research aimed at institutions" (p. 937.) Each phase shows the change in perception of what it meant to be Queer which is closely attached to views on homophobia.

During the first stage identified by Maher et al., (2009) homosexuality was seen as a disease requiring a cure. The first stage has a decidedly psychological flavor including no lesser personage than Freud (1938) weighting in on the debate. If it were a disease, then the issues to be researched would be causality and cure. These early researchers consider themselves to be reformers moving the study of homosexuality from sin to science. The corollary being, the Queer person should be studied and assisted not condemned. Assistance came in the curing of the afflicted individual of his/her Queerness. Many found the cure worse than the disease, since cures included things such as aversion therapy most commonly shock treatment and in some cases included lobotomy (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006).

It was also during this phase that Kinsey led researchers to begin to study sexuality as a normal aspect of human behavior. Kinsey's famous studies perceived sexuality as a continuum with heterosexuality and homosexuality being just pole with potential for many degrees of variance being possible between them (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953).

In Maher et al.'s second stage, beginning around 1972, the focus shifts to the study of society's treatment of the individual. It was 1972 when a small but vocal group succeeded in petitioning the American Psychiatric Association to delete homosexuality from their official manual of mental disorders, the Diagnostic and Statistical manual of mental disorders-III (DSM-III). Beginning in 1972 the focus shifted from the individual being ill to those reacting to the individual in a homophobic manner as being the ones whose behavior might be valuable for research and possible treatment. It is in this period

that Weinberg coined the term homophobia and used in his book, *Society and the healthy homosexual* (1972) to identify a fear some individuals may have of Queer people (Herek, 2004). It is important to add, however, that the concept of homosexuality as a disease in need of a cure continued through the second phase and is with us still today.

The third part of the empirical research identified by Maher et al. begins in the 1990s and considers the institutional effects of homophobia on society and the individual. It is during this period that a major number of name changes for homophobia are suggested. As Dermer, et al., (2010) point out, “The advent of specific language to encapsulate society’s prejudice against sexual minorities opened the door to seeing prejudicial and homonegative views of society as the ill to be combated rather than seeing the homosexuality as individual pathology”(p.329). In this phase institutions, such as the family, schools, and religion to name just three of the more important ones, began to be researched in relationship to their treatment of the Queer. It is in the current phase that Gregory Herek immersed as the leading researcher on homophobia.

Stigma of being Queer-institutional heterosexism

The influence of Herek is extensive including numerous articles as well as his position as editor of the book, *Stigma and sexual orientation: Understand prejudice against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals*, (1998). In the preface to this volume, he states a major theme to his work on homophobia that is the use of research in search of a reduction to prejudice against Queers. It is interesting to note that he also sees an applicability of his work to the fighting of other forms of stigma, i.e. racism, sexism, etc.

Herek and others have used the term stigma extensively (Dermer, et al., 2010; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Herek, 1998, 2000, 2004) to discuss the nature of homophobia as an institutional construction. Dermer, et al, (2010) provide a precise definition of stigma, “Stigma is the societal shame associated with a person based on an identity or characteristics that the dominant group devalues or finds unacceptable” (p.328). Being Queer in twenty-first century United States culture is clearly unacceptable. This unacceptability is manifest in attitudes which can become individual behaviors, or societal laws; the behaviors of individuals can range from subtle discrimination to full-fledged hate crimes, while the laws may allow discrimination in employment, housing, and civil liberties.

Herek, in his article, “The psychology of sexual prejudice” (2000) begins by discussing the words homophobia and heterosexism. He finds both words to be inaccurate for use in a scientific study of the prejudice experienced due to sexual orientation. He suggests the use of the more emotionally neutral term sexual prejudice to further discussion and research on the topic. As he points out homophobia is inaccurate because it is used to imply a dislike while the concept of phobia implies a less than rational fear. Heterosexism, on the other hand, is a systemic concept rather than an individual one. His hope being that replacing terms, homophobia and heterosexism, with sexual prejudice will further the ability for a scientific study of antigay attitudes and result in less prejudice toward Queers. He further states that anti-homosexual attitudes are a form of prejudice similar to racism or sexism and should also be studied in a like manner (Herek, 2000, 2004). In addition, in an earlier work Herek postulated that what

needed to be researched in the study of homophobia was the social context in which the prejudice against Queer people resided (Herek, 1985).

Seidman (2002), a sociologist, approaches the concept of heterosexism from the effect social oppression has on the individual. He states that the repression of Queer individuals, through being forced to be “closeted” (i.e. hiding his/her sexual orientation) is systemic in form. Specifically, he states, “Accordingly, the closet is not simply a product of individual ignorance and discrete acts of prejudice and discrimination, but is created by the actions of the government, the criminal justice system, families, and popular and scientific culture” (p.9). The nature of the closet and the impact of popular culture will be discussed in more detail later on in this study. For the Queer individual it is the greater social context which is of the utmost importance.

It is the social context in which one finds the bullying of young Queers in schools to the point that they decide the best thing for them to do is to quit school. It was the social context of a bar in Wyoming where a Queer by the name of Mathew Shepard made friends with the wrong people and ended up dead tied to some deer wire on the outskirts of the city, the victim of another hate crime. It is the social context where religious groups oppose the rights of Queers to marry or to provide legal protection for their loved ones (Seidman, 2002; Smith, 2010). And finally, it is within the social context of the media that both the Queer and non Queer see societies’ reflection of the “otherness” of the Queer. The messages of disregard and disrespect for Queer people are heard and internalized by both the dominant and non-dominant members of society.

Finally, the media has a major institutional impact on the visibility or invisibility of Queer people. Richard Dyer (2002) specifically speaks to this in his discussion of film and representation; it is his position that there is a reciprocal relationship between portrayal of a group member in film and how individuals of that group are treated in society.

Internalized homophobia

The literature on internalized homophobia usually begins with Gordon Allport's (1954) work on prejudice; this early work defines the concept of internalization in the following manner, "One's reputation, whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered, into one's head without doing something to one's character" (p. 142). Internalized homophobia is the acceptance by the Queer individual of some degree of the homonegativity that is all around him or her in a heterosexist society.

One of the first writers on internalized homophobia was Alan Malyon (1982) who identified the effects of the ingestion of the negative societal views on Queer people wanting and trying to live healthy lives. It was Malyon's belief that the antipathy of society toward Queer people tended to cause developmental problems for them, especially an inability to develop a healthy Queer identity. He feels this is due primarily to a Queer adolescent's inability to receive the peer support which is important to this transitional time of life.

In "Internalized stigma among sexual minority adults: Insights from a social psychological perspective", (Herek, et al., 2009) the authors discuss the nature of homophobia as an issue of stigmatization. "The term *sexual stigma* is used to refer broadly

to the negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords anyone associated with non-heterosexual behaviors, identity, relationships, or communities” (p. 33). Sexual stigma, they point out is manifest in three ways, the first two being related to the section on homophobia above but are included here: first, behaviorally through acts ranging from avoidance, through name calling, to physical violence. Secondly, societal control is produced through shared cultural knowledge and expectations of negative consequences for deviant sexual behavior. Thirdly, and most importantly for the current discussion, the internalized act of accepting the stigma established by society and making it a part of one’s own value system. They point out that children, as part of their socialization, learn the lessons of sexual stigma regardless of their later understanding of their own sexual orientation. This learning is problematic for the child who develops a sexual orientation which is not heteronormative.

Internalized homophobia in youth is emphasized in this thesis because of its relationship to suicide, but it is important to state that internalized homophobia can affect any person of any age who is not a member of the dominant sexual orientations. Seidman (2002) believes that coming out is affirming and liberating for a Queer person, but it does not free the individual from the feeling of shame and guilt which are so prevalent in the process of internalizing societies messages about what it means to be Queer. Maher et al. (2009) mention that Weinberg when he coined the concept homophobia included in his definition the idea of the internalized self-loathing a Queer person may experience. The term internalized homophobia was actually coined by Malyon in 1982 to signify the psychological harm the internalizing of societies negative perceptions could cause a

Queer individual. The *-phobia* in internalized homophobia is still problematic and substitutions in naming this phenomenon similar to those mentioned above have been suggested.

As Dermer, et al., (2010) point out, the feelings experienced rather than fear are, shame, guilt, perhaps anger and confusion. When an individual comes to the realization that he/she may not be strictly heterosexual the negative societal messages learned about the sexual minority are internalized. These messages come from many sources; Fejes and Petrich (1993) are predominantly interested in the role media plays and their examination is particularly relevant to this study. They state:

Whether the dominant media discourse defines homosexuality as a perversion, sickness or crime or defines it as a normal expression of human sexuality has a significant impact on how individual gay males or lesbians view themselves and their relationship to society (p.396-97).

While these messages are pertinent for people who already identify themselves as Queer it is especially significant for those still struggling with accepting a Queer identity.

These heteronormative messages include the society's belief the heterosexuality is the only acceptable way to be; in addition, it is the only healthy and "normal" means for an intimate relationship. Internalizing society's prejudices toward your own group can seriously hamper a healthy self-acceptance and in extreme can lead to self-loathing to the point of suicide (Tollerud & Slabon, 2009).

Queer Theory

One of the frustrating things about the literature on Queer theory is that many people discuss it, but finding a concrete definition of what it is, can be difficult. While discussing Queer theory and film, Benshoff and Griffin, (2004) identify it as a rejection of the restrictive biological construct of gender, and the acknowledgement of the fluidity of sexual orientation. They go on to articulate that Queer theory is so much more than gender or sexual orientation; it is these concepts imbedded in the study of history, culture and society which give them meaning. In addition, Hanson (1999) perceives:

The aims of queer theory are at once philosophical, political, and erotic—an effort, indeed, at blurring any distinction between them—since it seeks not only to analyze but also to resist, dismantle, or circumnavigate hegemonic systems of sexual oppression and normalization by revealing the theoretical presumptions and rhetorical slights of hand by which they establish, justify and reinforce their considerable power (p.4).

In short, it is the systemic study of sexual orientation and gender in all of their ramifications in our society. To consider the aspect of society, a Sociology based definition should also be considered.

In the book *Queer theory/sociology*, (1996) edited by Steven Seidman there is a chapter entitled, “I Can’t even think straight” which contains an excellent four part definition. Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer write:

We start to see the following hallmarks of queer theory: (1) a conceptualization of sexuality which sees sexual power embodied in different levels of social life,

expressed discursively and enforced through boundaries and binary divides; (2) the problematization of sexual and gender categories, and of identities in general. Identities are always on uncertain ground, entailing displacements of identification and knowing; (3) a rejection of civil rights strategies in favor of political of carnival, transgression, and parody which leads to deconstruction, decentering, revisionist readings, and an anti-assimilations politics; (4) a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality, and to conduct queer 'readings' of ostensibly heterosexual or non-sexualized texts. (p.134)

They go on to say, "At its widest, tallest, and Wilde(st), queer theory is a plea for massive transgression of all conventional categorizations and analyses – a Sadean/Nietzschean breaking of boundaries around gender/the erotic/ the interpersonal, and a plea for dissidence" (p.134).

In addition to the elements above on Queer theory, the focus of this article is a discussion of how the field of sociology would benefit from moving Queer theory from the margins to the center. As a means of doing this the authors discuss the earlier subdivisions of homosexual study in sociology, the empirical and the theoretical. They then review how Queer theory grew out of gay and lesbian studies, which were perceived as not inclusive enough. The two conclude the chapter asking how to incorporate a queerer theoretical approach to the sociological study, without what they see as the danger in the Queer theorist of theorizing without inclusion of the lives of real Queer people.

Continuing in the sociology and Queer theory vein, Adam Green's article, "Queer theory and sociology: Locating the subject and the self in sexuality studies" (2007), discusses the similarities and differences between these two fields of study. His purpose in writing the article was to "revisit the relationship of queer theory and sociology in order to address some critical issues around conceiving the subject and 'the self' in sexualities research" (p.26). His emphasis is on the deconstructionist aspect of Queer theory and his two major points are to remind the reader that sociology also has its own deconstructionist tendencies while also acknowledging that Queer theory has a particular focus on deconstructing sexuality. His conclusion, as he states is

I argue that while each of these approaches begins with a deconstructionist gesture, queer theory is uniquely committed to the dissolution of the subject, with profound implications for the kinds of questions, methods, and theory building that may follow from its epistemological premises (2007, p.27).

Green's summation of Queer theory reiterates the function of identity in this theory and the concept of performance, which comes from the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) (see below). For Green, like so many others scholars, the basis of Queer theory are the works of Butler and Foucault. Green sees; Butler's contribution as the division between performing gender and identity of the sexual being, while Foucault's primary contribution is the sexual self in the modern person (2007).

Michel Foucault's *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction* (1978) is often referred to as one of the primary works in development of Queer theory. The book

is divided into five parts, each part dealing with some aspect of sexual history beginning with repression during the Victorian era, and ending with the right and power of the state in terminating the lives of its citizens. Throughout the book sex is approached as a fluid concept which is one of the reasons Foucault is so strongly tied to Queer theory. Another and more important aspect of his writing is his insistence on the importance of separating the individual sexual behavior from the roles placed on it by society. His position would be that Queer sex is not what makes the Queer as defined by society. It is interesting to note, in consulting the index the reader finds that the topic of homosexuality is addressed in passing only three times; lending credence to Foucault's seeing the importance of social context over sexual behavior. Therefore, Foucault discusses the relationship between sexuality and power; his argument is that as the concept of the state grew the idea of control over sexuality also grew. It is however, his concept of "power" which is most central to Queer theory; specifically he proposes that it is through sexuality that the modern state regulates its people. In addition, reference to Foucault and his understanding of sexuality and power are also instrumental to Queer film theory which will be discussed, in detail, below (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004; Dyer, 2002).

Lynne Huffer's recent publication, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the foundations of queer theory* (2010), an attempt to reconcile Queer theory based in Foucault's (1978) *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction* with the writing of feminists such as Judith Butler. It is Huffer's position that the origins of Queer theory can only be truly understood by reading Foucault's *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*. She describes Foucault's philosophical writing as a process of doubling

and redoubling on itself with later ideas building on earlier statements. Although many American theorists see *The history of sexuality* as the beginning of Queer theory she states that *Madness*, originally published in France in 1961 contains the seed for understanding Foucault's vision. For Huffer, the element that is missing from *The history of sexuality* is the ethical which is fundamental to the feminist writers. She states, "*Mad for Foucault*, on the other hand, explicitly addresses the feminist origins of Queer theory in order to link Foucault's ethical thinking about sexuality to a long tradition of feminist ethics" (2010, p. 34). The type of philosophical approach one would find in the works of Queer feminist philosopher Judith Butler.

Butler, in her works *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), agrees with and expands upon the theory of Foucault on power and sexuality. For example, Foucault's hypothesis that the sex of the individual is a "regulatory ideal" (Foucault, 1990, p.105) is taken forward by Butler into the concept of "heterosexual imperative" (Butler, 1993, p.2). As she states, "What will, I hope, become clear in what follows is that the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual differences in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (p. 2). To encapsulate Butler's philosophy from the above statement the following points can be made: first, the physical sex one is born with has a regulatory effect on one's life- beginning by being wrapped in a pink or blue blanket to being told little girls/boys do not act in that manner; secondly, regulation leads to performance, that is being told how to act as a good boy or girl leads to one performing his/her sex role as deemed appropriate,

moving us from sex to gender; thirdly, the material body takes on these performative aspects and the societal designation of power as appropriate to gender; which finally, brings society as a whole to the necessity of agreeing that the only appropriate way to represent ones sex is through heterosexuality. Anyone not adhering to his/her appropriate hegemonic role becomes part of the marginalized.

The marginalized as Queer theory and feminist theory agree, while differing in emphasis as to who and what is the perceived problem, consider society's hegemonic control to be too restrictive for all of those who fall outside the dominant culture in whatever categories, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, etc. Butler and Queer theory are about breaking down the categories and letting the individual free from the societal imposed pressures.

It is Butler's position that the concept of queerness is beyond gender, beyond the binary concepts of male/female as well as heterosexual/homosexual. For Butler queerness is about a state of being encompassing attitude, worldview, and a way of seeing and responding (Butler, 1990; Doty, 1993).

Professor Nan Boyd (2008), identifies the importance of using oral history in researching Queer history. Due to the marginalized nature of this population, written records are often either biased, as in newspaper accounts of bar raids, or nonexistent. She discusses the work of several authors, their works, and their methodologies who have used oral history to capture pre-Stonewall Queer life. The authors that she identifies display a progression in their use of oral history. In identifying the importance of this method, she specifically points to feminist researchers in their allowing the subjects to

speak for themselves. She says, “Feminist researchers try to empower (rather than exploit) historical narrators by trusting their voices, positioning narrators as historical experts, and interpreting narrators’ voices alongside the narrators’ interpretations of their own memories” (pp.177-178). A subset of Queer theory, which is important to this work, is Queer film theory.

Queer Film Theory

Just as the term Queer is a reclaiming of a word, so can the concept of Queer film theory be seen as a reclaiming of film. Throughout the history of film making there have been many Queer people involved in the process; actors, directors, writers, editors, costumers and possibly a “Best Boy” or two have all contributed to the cinema without the ability to bring their whole person to the endeavor. When these contributors to the film industry came to work the homophobia of the society required that they leave their Queer selves at home in the closet. Therefore, the function of Queer film theory is to take back from the dominant culture the analysis of the Queer in film and the meanings attached, and allow for the voice of this population to be heard (Rushton & Bettinson, 2010). Queer theory honors a counter hegemonic reading of mainstream cinema; while also identifying the components that make a film viewed by the non-dominant sexual orientation, a Queer film (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006). In addition, this film theory returns to its roots in the Queer theory of Foucault and Butler. It honors Foucault by questioning the sexual power relations of Queer and non-Queer (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004; Rushton & Bettinson, 2010); while also observing the nuances that Hollywood, as an instrument of the state, adds to our understanding of sexuality (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004). In

addition, Queer film theory identifies even more closely with Butler by postulating that the idea of gender and sexuality as performance is closely related to the Queer concept of camp (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004). It is this concept of performance and the reading of performance which permeates the theory of what makes a Queer film.

Benshoff & Griffin, (2006) identify characteristics which can be used to identify a film as Queer. Their framework consists of the following factors; a film can be considered Queer if: a) some or all of the characters within the film are not strictly heterosexual; or b) some of the essential members of the production are Queer, i.e. director, producer, and/or actors; or c) the viewing public is Queer and reads the film from that theoretical viewpoint; d) certain non-mainstream genres could be considered Queer just by their nature, for example horror movies; and finally, the voyeuristic nature of film itself (Denzin,1995) can be, simply by it being a step removed from reality, a Queer event. The summation of the five items listed above makes any film by definition a Queer film.

However, making all film Queer does not add clarity to an analysis of film, therefore, for the discussion of this study only the first three items will be considered. That is, a Queer film is one in which one or more of the main characters is Queer; and/or one or more of the main production members are Queer; and, perhaps, most importantly, one or more audience members find Queer meaning in reading a mainstream film (Doty, 2000; Rushton & Bettinson, 2010). It is important to add a caveat to the concept of a Queer character; most theorists (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006) would agree that if the character is in the film only as the focus of demeaning or degrading humor, the film

would not be considered a Queer film. And yet, it may be the visuals of demeaning or degrading portrayals of Queers which most affect a non-heterosexual's identity the most.

Identity Formation

Mainstream

Erik Erikson (1968, 1980) is considered to be one of the foremost experts on identity formation of members of the dominant culture. His works discuss the normative model, i.e. the white male heterosexual youth. In his work Erikson theorizes on the importance of the youth separating from his family of origin in his attempt to individualize himself. In this developmental stage Erikson suggests an individual is moving from the influence of the family of origin to the influence of the peer group. Erikson characterizes youth during this period as pack-like and states, "Young people can become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others who are 'different,' in skin color or cultural background, in tastes and fits, and often in entirely petty aspects of dress and gesture arbitrarily selected as the signs of an in-grouper or out-grouper" (1968, p. 132). Sexual orientation would, of course, be one of those differences which many youth would consider an appropriate reason for exclusion.

Savin-Williams (2003), while discussing what he calls "the new gay teenager" identifies the need to see the Queer youth first as just another teenager, then to identify those other components of his/her identity. It is his contention that most researchers ignore the universal aspects of the Queer teenager in an effort to focus on just one identity aspect. All teenagers are first teens and then other factors such as race or sexual

orientation may or may not be important to how they are perceived by themselves and/or others.

Marginalized

As an aside, it is interesting to note the similarity in vocabulary used when talking about youth of color or sexual minority youth. In both cases, one of the commonly used terms is “at-risk”. The use of this term continues to marginalize the youth in question always pointing to statuses of being perceived as “less than” or “deviant from” the white heteronormative model (Savin-Williams, 2003).

People of Color

As suggested above, Erikson’s (1968, 1980) work identifies the life cycle of members of the dominant culture: white male heterosexuals; but what of those not of the dominant culture? The identity formation for youth of color, for example, includes not only the concept of personal individualization but usually also includes group identification around the concept of race. Psychologist, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997), in her chapter “Identity Development in Adolescence” in *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* discusses the need for Black children to bond together in response to their developing racial identity. She points out that, “Given the impact of dominant and subordinate statuses, it is not surprising that researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be actively engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are White adolescents” (p.5).

Tatum, in discussing the identity development of Black youth draws from the work of Psychologist, William E. Cross, Jr. and his work *Shades of black*, (1991) in

which he identifies the stages of African-American identity. Dr. Cross uses a five stage approach which he names: “Pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization and internalization-commitment” (pp.190-223). In the works of Tatum and Cross, individuals who are unaware of the systemic nature of racism and its effects would be in the pre-encounter state. This would be a normal state for young children. However, as they mature most people of color gain knowledge of the racism around them consequently moving into the encounter stage.

Identity development of youth of color is included in this review as a separate category because of the additional stigma they confront during the coming out process, also referred to as Queer identity development. It is important to remember that people of color have an even greater challenge in coming to terms with their twice as marginalized statuses in a racist, homophobic nation like the United States (Cowan, Heiple, Marquez, Khatchadourian and McNevin, 2005; Kulkin, et al., 2000; Maher, et.al, 2009; Savin-Williams, 2003; Tollerud & Slabon, 2009). In addition, as Maher et.al (2009) indicate, since the early 1990’s researchers conducting empirical research on Queers and institutions, such as schools, families and the workplace, have as a matter of course, included people of color in their literature reviews as a means of highlighting the diversity of the Queer community and to begin to expand on the white male only paradigm which had so often been the sole focus of the research.

A final thought on youth of color, who may also be Queer, is added in the research by Tollerud and Salbon (2009) who note that individuals who are part of a minority ethnic group tend to identify with ethnicity/race as important components to who they

are. For these youth the coming out process is even more stressful due to the perceived need to choose one of his/her identities over the other. Some feel they can belong to their racial group but not be Queer or be Queer at the cost of disengaging from their racial group. Unfortunately, there is as much racism in the Queer population as there is in the non-queer making the loss of racial/ethnic community very difficult for the Queer youth of color.

Queer People

When discussing the identity formation of Queer youth it might first be useful to mention that accepting a Queer identity has a unique name, it is referred to as “coming out”. The concept of “coming out” has a component part which is the “closet”; that place from which the Queer person emerges. Therefore the full phrase is, “coming out of the closet”. Being in the closet is to hid one’s Queer identity; coming out is to tell at least one other person that one is Queer. And finally, coming out is a lifelong process for the Queer individual because each new person met requires the decision whether or not to reveal ones sexual identity (Seidman, 2002).

In addition, when “coming out” a Queer youth is in a different social milieu than a majority youth or any other marginalized youth. This isolation is due to their being few role models and a societal environment which is hostile to any form of sexuality other than straight heterosexual (Fejes & Petrich, 1993).

Coleman (1982) constructed an early Queer identity model based on the work of Erikson. He agreed with Erikson that each step must be resolved before the individual could complete a later stage; and that it was possible for an individual to be imprisoned in

one stage and unable to move on. The five stages he identified were: “Pre- coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and identity integration” (p. 32). It is in the pre-coming out stage that a youth is most vulnerable because he/she does not know what is wrong but has a sense of alienation, isolation, discontent. It is in this stage that a youth is most vulnerable to destructive behaviors including suicide. The importance in Coleman’s model lies in his following of Erikson the icon of identity formation theory and in his use of the term “coming out” which is a standard word in Queer culture for the process of self discovery. However, his model shares many similarities to that of Cass and it is Cass’ model which is seen as the standard by which others are viewed.

Vivienne Cass, a psychologist, (1979, 1984), developed and then tested a six stage model for homosexual identity formation which is considered to be the foundation upon which other models and discussion are based (Brady & Busse, 1994; Maher, et.al, 2009; Troiden, 1989). Cass identifies two assumptions as the foundation of her model. The first is “identity is acquired through a developmental process” and secondly, “that locus for stability of, and change in, behavior lies in the interaction process that occurs between individuals and their environments” (1979, p.219). The question that she posed for herself was how does one acquire a homosexual identity? The answer she derives is six steps of development which result in a fully integrated sense of self if the individual continues through the process. However, it is possible for the individual to stop at any step along the way. That is, the individual (either male or female) must be an active participant.

Cass based her model on interpersonal congruency theory, which holds that consistency and the lack thereof in a person's behavior are contingent on the interpersonal tensions that exist in the person's environment. In addition she points out that all children are socialized under the assumption of heterosexuality. The six stages of her model are: "1) Identity confusion, 2) Identity comparison, 3) Identity tolerance, 4) Identity acceptance, 5) Identity pride, and 6) Identity synthesis" (1979, pp.222-235). As an individual evolves along this continuum his/her identity becomes more integrated.

The first phase of her six phase model which she identifies as "Identity confusion" (p.222) the individual not only knows that there is a way of being which is identified as homosexual but also that way of being may have something to do with him/her. As Queer thoughts, desires and ultimately behaviors become more prevalent a feeling of imbalance grows between seeing the self as heterosexual and this growing Queer awareness. In this phase, the individual begins to question all aspects of his/her being. The first possible approach to this imbalance may be to see the new identity as positive and continue with a Queer persona. The second approach to the imbalance may be to see the Queer awareness as undesirable and the individual strives for a return to the heterosexual persona suppressing the internal Queer. At some level awareness of the imbalance remains and the development of a negative or self-hating individual may begin. In the third approach a reframing of the imbalance occurs where the Queer is reframed as something other than Queer so as the individual can continue to perceive him/herself as heterosexual (pp.222-225).

Second phase Cass identifies as “Identity Comparison” (p.225) and follows the first phase with the individual beginning to accept the possibility of a Queer identity. While the first phase had the individual struggling with issues of identity, the second has the struggle revolving around alienation from society. Feelings of difference, isolation and otherness begin to occur. All knowledge of how to be in the world come into question since the individual is now identifying as Queer in a heteronormative world. The problem in this second stage concerns those who are not pleased with their potential identity as Queer people. It is this group who may find the alienation from both society and self so overwhelming that they may believe the only solution is suicide. Cass states, that some individuals in this stage failing to find coping strategies that work will be left with “such a degree of self-hatred that should continual attempts to renew the strategy fail,(the individual) could commit suicide” (p.227).

In the third stage, “identity tolerance” (1979, p.229) the individual moves from thinking I am probably a homosexual to I am a homosexual while looking for community. The finding of a GLBT community can have either a positive or a negative impact on the individual’s tolerance of his/her new identity. Negative experiences with the GLBT community can result in a devaluation of this subculture by the individual. A reaction may occur such as if that what it is to be Queer I do not want that for myself. In addition, it is a time of greater alienation from the heterosexual community.

“Identity acceptance”, the fourth stage finds the individual moving further and further into the Queer world, finding normalcy and validation for self. The questions of who one is and who are my people are being answered. In this stage the individual is

presented with three strategies for dealing with the non-Queer other: passing, limiting interaction, and the path of selective coming out.

In the fifth stage, “identity pride” (p. 233), the individual has found a sense of belonging in the LGBT community and takes pride in who he/she is and what the community is doing. This stage sees and immersion in Queer culture, a preference for all thing gay, and a valuing of gay activism. A refutation of all things heterosexual may occur. Pride in a Queer identity leads to less passing and more disclosure of self.

Finally, in the sixth stage, “identity synthesis” (p. 234), the individual no longer believes that neither are all heterosexuals the enemy nor are all Queer people friends. It is in this stage that the individual finds more and more people who are as accepting of a Queer identity as he/she is. With synthesis the Queer identity becomes only one component part of who the individual is and not the overriding persona.

Five years later, Cass published a follow up to the above article entitled “Homosexual identity formation: Testing a theoretical model” (1984), in which she discusses her attempt to test her six stage model. She begins with a review of the ten models that had been suggested on Queer identity formation; identifies the verity in the number of steps or stages each theory proposed; and finally, suggests that there is considerable similarity among the stages in these various models. Overall, four consistent phases occurred, first, realization and acceptance of a Queer label for self, secondly, growing positivity around the Queer identity, followed by coming out to others both of the non-dominant and dominant sexual orientation, and finally, increased and deeper social contact with other members of the non-dominant group.

To test her six stage model Cass sent out questionnaires to 227 individuals who identified as homosexual and had 178 returned for a 78.4% return rate. All but 12 of the respondents were able to indicate into which stage of Cass' model they fell. The 12 unable to so identify felt they inhabited more than one stage. Evaluating the answers in the 210 item questionnaires, lead Cass to the belief that identity did follow a development process as outlined in the paragraph above; and she reduced her six stage model to four stages, combining stages one and two as well as stages five and six. The new four stage model contained: identity confusion, identity tolerance, identity acceptance and identity synthesis (Cass, 1984)

Sociologist, Richard R. Trioden (1989) developed another frequently cited model for Queer identity formation. His model contains four ideal types, which are similar to the process discussed by Cass but with a sociological perspective. For Troiden it is the individual finding his/her identity within the context of society; and the types are perceived as abstractions. One of the germane things he says in relation to the various model on Queer identity developing is that most theorist recognize the development takes place against a background of stigma held by society toward the identity being developed. The difficulty coming to terms with being Queer resides in the internalized stigma of joining a marginalized and feared minority. It is this repeated reference to stigma of being Queer and how the individual manages that stigma, which separates Troiden's approach from that of Cass.

The first stage he identifies is "sensitization" (p.50) during which the individual recognizes his/her difference from age appropriate peers. This type tends to occur prior to

puberty and is an awakening to the meaning of difference one may have always felt.

Troiden perceives this recognition of difference as social and usually not sexual.

The second stage is labeled “identity confusion” (p.52) and is a time in the life of the individual where he/she begins to reflect on actions and thoughts as being Queer in nature. This is a period of ambiguity and not knowing where in the sexual orientation spectrum one fits. To further complicate the process, for most people, this stage occurs during middle to late puberty. The heterosexual self, one expected to develop into is not there and just what does that mean for the individual? In discussing this stage, Troiden quotes Cass extensively while still slanting the discussion of identity development toward the societal influences. In this regard, he identifies the stigma placed on a Queer being as a further addition to the confusion of a youth who does not want to be so labeled. He identifies society’s condemnation of non-dominant sexual orientation as contributing to feeling of shame, guilt and a need for secrecy for members of this marginalized group.

Troiden then names five strategies an individual may use for coping with this stage; they are “denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition and acceptance” (pp. 55-56). He points out that one or more of the mechanisms may be used at the same time. Although he again cites Cass in these stages, he does not discuss the possibility of suicide as a coping strategy.

“Identity assumption” (p. 59) is the third stage of this model. Here the individual is internalizing the Queer identity while also beginning to personify the Queer in public. For both genders, an involvement with a Queer other may be the context in which this stage takes place. It is within the context of discussing this stage that Troiden inserts the

following interesting sentence: “Perceptions of the increased risks of living as a homosexual in a homophobic society may also encourage individuals to cling to non-homosexual perceptions of self” (p. 61). This statement is particularly relevant to this thesis because one of the means of “perceived increased risk” could be the portrayal of Queer characters in Hollywood cinema.

In a homophobic society once an individual takes on the marginalized sexual orientation identity, the necessity of coping with the stigma attached to that identity must be managed. Troiden provides four stigma avoidance strategies: “capitulation, minstrelization, passing and group alignment” (p.61). Strategies can be used singularly or in concert. By the end of the third stage the individual is becoming more accepting of his/her new identity. Acceptance moves the individual into Troiden’s final stage.

“Commitment” (p.63) is the final stage of this model. Troiden sees commitment as an adoption of a Queer way of life; it is the becoming of an integrated Queer persona. Part of this commitment according to Troiden revolves around the recognition that one would not abandon being Queer if somehow it became miraculously possible. It is during the commitment stage that the individual comes out to more people. It is also during this final stage that three new strategies for managing stigma appear. Troiden identifies them as “covering, blending, and conversion” (p.66). These strategies are used depending upon in which situation an individual finds him/herself. It is also pointed out in this section that a Queer identity is continuously evolving, never really fixed for the individual.

The model created by Troiden is most compatible with the ideas of this thesis. His model considers the social construction of identity; the sociological concepts on suicide and the influence of media specifically film on how our social world is constructed.

A more recent psychological model of Queer identity development was published in 1994 by Brady and Busse and replicated Cass' study receiving similar results. However, in this later study the questionnaire was simplified; instead of the 210 items used by Cass, Brady and Busse developed an assessment tool of only 45 true or false items. The value in the tool is in assisting clinicians in observing the coming out process of their clients. It is interesting to note, that while developing the questionnaire only male subjects were used, therefore, the authors claim no reliability on using the tool to observe lesbian coming out process (1994).

In discussing Cass (1979; 1984) and Troiden (1989) reviewed above, Kulkin, et al., (2000) state, "exploring the various developmental models and theories pertaining to homosexuality, it becomes evident there are many opportunities for a gay or lesbian individual to become isolated and stigmatized due to a homophobic society" (p.20). In turn, it is feelings of isolation and perhaps guilt and shame, which can lead an individual to suicide.

Suicide

Sociologists and suicide theorists (Kulkin, et al., 2000; Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001; Phillips, 1974; Thorlindsson & Bjarnason, 1998) point to the work of Emile Durkheim (1951) as the starting point for the modern study of suicide. It is also the Durkheim definition of suicide that is used for this research. "Suicide is, death resulting

from behavior that the individual knows will lead to his/her own demise. Whether death is desired is immaterial: only the individual's awareness of the consequences of his/her behavior is relevant" (Durkheim, 1951, p. 44). Durkheim, originally writing in 1857, theorized factors which contributed to a person being more at risk of taking his/her own life. Some of the vocabulary he used is standard today in the discussion of suicide, for example, he spoke of isolation, anomie, and alienation as risk factors. It is not surprising that many of these same terms are also used when discussing Queer suicide (Kulkin, et al., 2000). It is important to mention that the main problem in a study of suicide, and its subset imitative suicide, is the inability to question the deceased perpetrator about factors such as causality.

The issue of youth suicide has risen in concern among the helping professions as the incident of young people killing themselves remains statistically similar to that of adults. However, due to the concern over the waste of young lives, researchers have turned more attention to this age group over the past several decades (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Center for Disease Control, (CDC) statistics show suicide to be the number three killer of youth between the ages of 15 to 24 (CDC, 2008). Sometimes lost among the research on youth suicide is the estimation that Queer youth tend to be three times more like to kill themselves than their non-Queer peers. Consequently, suicide, a preventable killer has become the leading cause of death among young members on the non-dominant sexual orientation (Kulkin, et al., 2000).

Queer Youth Suicide

Kristopher Wells, writing in *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* (2009) reviews the research on suicidality of sexual minority youth. Summarizing the finding of several other authors he cites different researchers conclusions that gay, lesbian, and questioning youth are more likely to contemplate, attempt, and finalize the act of suicide. Study after study (D'Augelli, et al., 2005; Kulkin, et al., 2000; Maher, 2009; Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001; Walls, et al., 2008) point to findings that indicate Queer youth are at greater risk for depression, high risk behavior and homelessness than their non Queer counterparts.

Maher et al. (2009), while citing the literature on Queer youth suicide begin with what they identify as “a very controversial study” (p. 933) by the US Department of Health and Human Services in 1989 that was the first to conclude that Queer youth were two or three times more to attempt suicide than were their non-Queer peers. The cause of the controversy was the sexual minority topic; elements of the government, including members of Congress tried to suppress the report or have mental health named as the cause of these deaths. This controversy provides once again, an example of institutionalized heterosexism.

Morrison and L'Heureux (2001) also reviewed the literature on sexual minority suicides and considered the information from a clinician point of view. Using what the authors refer to as an ecological analysis, they observe the youth in both a micro and macro environment. Similarly to many others writing on this topic the authors point out that adolescents who are marginalized and victimized are more likely to kill themselves

than others which is consistent with the original theories of Durkheim. They state that one of the main Durkheim tenets is that “one of the major reasons people kill themselves is a lack of integration into the dominant culture (p.39)”. Viewing Queer youth suicide from the point of a helping clinician, the authors point out the importance of viewing the youth’s interaction with society as a whole. The clinician should consider factors such as: the family, the schools, religion and the media, when evaluating a suicide risk and possible need for intervention. A youth living in a homophobic/heterosexist family, school, etc. is at greater risk due to lack of support and greater isolation.

This position is also supported by Kulkin, et al.,(2000), who discuss Durkheim’s concept of Anomic suicide. In Anomic suicide the individual is marginalized to a point of becoming almost a moral outlaw; this lack of a moral code or societal support leads some to kill themselves. The authors see the loss of a heterosexual identity in a homophobic world as pushing the young Queer to these margins.

When writing on the risk factors for a completed suicide the authors report on the general risks factors for all sexual orientations, which are “a psychiatric history, a family history of suicide, substance abuse, and the availability of a lethal method.” And, the addition items applicable to sexual minority youth, which are: “(1) acknowledge their sexual orientation at an early age; (2) report a sexual abuse and/or familial abuse history; (3) do not disclose their sexual orientation to anyone; (4) self-present with high levels of gender non-conformity; and (5) report high levels of intrapsychic conflict regarding their sexual orientation” (p.42). Feelings of isolation create the risk for both youth at both

ends of the coming out process, those who come out to others at an early age and those who do not feel safe enough to come out to anyone.

Finally, the authors discuss the exclusion, of information about the existence of non-dominant sexual orientation in K- 12 schools. A lack of information about sexual minority members raises an additional risk factor for Queer youth. As the authors state, “without the inclusion of adequate role models in the curriculum, GLB youth have little to feel proud about in terms of their identity” (p.43).

In a recent study by, Walls, et al., (2008) conducted at a local community services agency in Denver, 182 youth, ages 14 to 21, of the non-dominant sexual orientation were studied. Feelings of hopelessness were particularly reviewed in this study because the literature (Beck, Steer, Kovacs, & Garrison, 1985) identifies hopelessness as being more important as a suicidal indicator than depression.

The Beck et al., (1985) found that participants who reported feeling hopelessness for extended periods, in the study defined as two consecutive weeks or more, had a nine times greater correlation with reporting suicidal ideation and were five times more likely to report a suicide attempt. Overall their finding conformed to prior studies in affirming that Queer youth seeking social services are at greater risk than the general population for suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

The list of risk factors in teenage suicidal ideation was compiled following a review of the literature over a ten years span, is as follows:

depression, substance abuse, conduct and other disruptive disorders, poor interpersonal problem-solving skills, family history of suicidal behavior and

psychopathology, poor parent-child relationships, physical and sexual abuse, school and work problems, *media exposure to suicidal behavior*, and lower levels of religiosity and family cohesion (emphasis added, Gould, Greenberg, Velting & Shaffer, 2003, pp.389-394)

The item “media exposure to suicidal behavior” is highlighted due to its correlation to imitative suicide and American cinema as a form of media; both of which are discussed in detail as having an effect in Queer youth suicide.

Russell and Joyner using a much larger national sample, 11,940 students in grades 7 through 12, found approximately 7% of these youth stating they had either experienced an attraction to or a relationship with a person of the same-sex. These 7% also reported suicidal attempts at a rate greater than twice the number reported by the rest of the sample. The authors note that this rate is much lower than that reported in prior studies. A possible response to the low numbers might be found in the research (Maher, et al., 2009; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Thurlow, 2001) on tremendous amount of violence and harassment Queer students experience in school and the lack of safety when a student comes out or is forced out in this setting.

In concluding the literature on Queer suicide it is important to mention the work of Savin-Williams who rejects the ideas that youth whose sexual orientation challenges the rules of a heteronormative society are more likely to commit suicide (Savin-Williams, 2003; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). His position is based in his belief that the samples used to identify youth in these studies are flawed. While discussing the problem in the selection of participants for the studies of gay youth in the 1980’s and 1990’s Savin-

Williams point to the sample most often used; that is, youth perceived to be “at risk” and receiving or in need of receiving social services. He then discards the entire research finding from this group based on sample bias. His belief is that there are many youth having sex which would be defined as Queer, but who do not define themselves as being Queer. Because of the absence of this self-identity, these individuals are never part of the sample and are the mentally healthiest of the Queer population.

In support of this thesis, Savin-Williams and Ream (2003) using statistics, derived from an internet questionnaire, data collected via an OutProud questionnaire responded to by 681 youth between 13 and 25, to determined that the number of sexual minority youth who contemplate committing suicide. They discovered there may be no difference in suicidal rate between sexual minority member youth and those of the dominant sexual orientation.

Savin-Williams theorize that Queer youth who kill themselves are influenced by multiple other factors not necessarily relating to a Queer identity. One of the factors he identifies as a possible causation of Queer youth suicides is, the “witnessing others attempt suicide (2003, p.85)” an interesting transition into the topic of imitative suicide.

Imitative Suicide

The research on imitative suicide is reviewed here in some detail because of its relevance to the effect of Queers viewing cinema containing role models who end up dead in or before the final reel. The literature is listed from the general, (i.e. there is a spike in suicides following the published suicide of a celebrity) to the specific, (i.e. youth appear to be more suggestible to suicidality than adults are, and media plays a part in

making the suggestion). The information appears below as follows: The original research on imitative suicide by Phillips (1974) sets the tone for the concept; his article is followed by the other articles that study the possible effect various types of media may have on suggestion and suicide and the prevalence of teenager's susceptibility to this suggestion. The penultimate article considers a televised series of films which may have had caused a spike in teenage suicides in the greater New York area. While the final article presents an overview of the possible effect of all media on imitative suicide.

Professor David P. Phillips (1974) in his first article on imitative suicide entitled *The influence of suggestion on suicide: substantive and theoretical implication of the Werther effect* identifies data to support his thesis that there is an increase of suicides when newspapers cover the suicide of a well-known individual. Using suicide statistics covering the period, 1946-1968, from the US department of Health and a variety of newspapers including, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *London Daily Mirror*; he found a significant increase of suicides in the month of the publication of a front page story on a well-known person killing him/herself. By way of analysis, he looked at the number of suicides in the same month for the year prior and the year following a celebrity suicide. For clarification, he explains his method as follows using the death of KKK leader Daniel Burros who killed himself November 1, 1965 after it was revealed that he was Jewish. The number of suicides in November 1964 was 1,639, while 1,665 was the number in 1966; the average of the two is 1,652, which would be a reasonable expected number for 1965 when the Burros suicide occurred. However, in November of 1965 there were 1,710, which are 58 more than statistically projected.

Newspapers in both the US and Britain were used to determine if a story relevant to one country would have a comparable effect in the suicide rates in the other country. His finding that the spike in the suicidal death rate in one country following a localized occurrence was not reflected as a similar spike in the other country lends credence to his hypothesis. That is, the celebrity statues and the front-page published story in one country were not published in the other and there was no corollary spike in suicide rates in the second country; if a spike had occurred in both countries the cause would have to have been something other than imitation. The exception to this localized effect was the suicidal death of Marilyn Monroe in 1962, which was followed by the greatest spike in both countries. The fact that Monroe was an idolized international Hollywood film star has relevance to the present study.

An additional point in his hypothesis which would be much more difficult to prove is that the person influenced by the suicide of another is more likely to occur if the imitator sees similarities between him/herself and the well-known victim. Specifically he states, "A model is more likely to be imitated if he is prestigious and if his circumstances are thought to be similar to those of the imitator" (1974, p. 352).

Phillips hypothesis contradicts the belief of the original researcher on suicides, Emile Durkheim (1951), who considered the possibility of connecting suicides and suggestion and then rejected that concept. He believed that there might be a slight influence of one suicide following another but felt that the possible imitator would have died by suicide at a later time anyway and there was no overall effect to the national suicidal average. Phillips notes that others who have followed Durkheim's study of

suicide have also rejected a possible connection between suggestion and killing oneself. For example, as Phillips points out, Farberow (1972) in his, *Bibliography on suicide and suicide prevention, 1897-1970*, listed thousands of items but did not include anything related to suggestion or imitation. However, Phillips and others whose research is reviewed below have found support for the concept that one suicide may influence subsequent suicides. In this research (Gould & Shaffer, 1986; Rustad, Small, Jobes, Safer, & Peterson, 2003; Schmidtke & Hafner, 1986) there is some discussion of the effect of media on imitative suicide beginning with Phillips' original work (1974) and the novel by Goethe. In addition, Gould and Shaffer (1986) discuss a televised film series in New York that may have spawned a localized imitative suicide occurrence. The irony as Gould and Shaffer (1986) report resides in the fact that the film series, which may have caused an imitative suicide outbreak, was made specifically to prevent additional teenage suicides. As an adjunct to the four televised programs teacher guides were sent to the schools in the viewing area and the emphasis was on prevention, however, the data reviewed by Gould and Shaffer suggests an increase in teenage suicides may have been the result. The question presented in this thesis is, could there also be an imitative suicide effect for Queer youth who see a mainstream film in which the Queer character is either killed for being Queer or takes his/her own life?

For the purpose of this thesis, it is useful to note why Professor Phillips labeled his first study, the Werther Effect, thereby highlighting the interconnectivity of media and imitative suicide. In the 18th century, Goethe wrote a novel titled *The sorrows of the young Werther* in which the hero shoots himself. Phillips states, "Goethe's novel was

read widely in Europe, and it was said that people in many countries imitated Werther's manner of death" (1974, p.340). Stack (1990) adds details about the original imitative suicides that were not included in the Phillips (1974) article. He points out that, "some dead persons were found with a copy of the novel nearby or even in their hands" (1990, pp. 114-115). He also states that these people were reader who he identifies as an "educated elite" who might be a type more prone to pre-suicidal thinking (1990, p.115). In support of this hearsay evidence focusing on the likelihood that media, in this case a novel, might contribute to the possibility of suicide Phillips points to the book being banned in several European countries.

Writing in 1980, Professor Phillips expanded his theory on imitative suicide to include a specific type of murder suicide via commercial airplanes following highly publicized news stories on a murder-suicide. The article, "Airplane accidents, murder, and a mass media: Towards a theory of imitation and suggestion", is divided into two parts; in the first, the author explores incidents of commercial airplane accidents that occurred in a seven day period following a front-page article about a murder-suicide. He finds that there is an increase in commercial airplane accidents following the publishing of a first page story on a murder suicide. Not only is there a spike, but the spike tend to follow a specific pattern starting slowly reaching a high on the third or fourth day then declining with a minor secondary spike on approximately day seven. The data used to support his theory includes 17 cases of murder suicide during the period, 1968 through 1973. However, it is the theory that he discusses in the second half of the paper which is more relevant here.

In the second half of the article, he lays out what he entitles, “A brief theory of imitation and suggestion” (p. 1014). Phillips presents this theory as a beginning point on the topic of an imitative theory for sociology. He believes that there are parallels that can be drawn between contagion in biology and in sociology. Using a biological construct, Phillips talks about six analogies concerning contagion that translate to imitation in a sociological theory. The first is the “incubation period” which in imitative suicide would be the time between the original suicide or murder-suicide and the imitative act. The second, he identifies in biology as immunization and he asks is it possible to immunize a person against suicide? Thirdly, in “specific versus diffuse contagion” Phillips observes that in biology a specific germ or bacteria cause a specific disease; he then wonders if the same holds true for imitative suicide. It is the fourth contagion analogy which is most relevant to this thesis; “susceptibility to contagion”, in this analogy Phillips asks what causes one person to perform imitatively but not another. If one is talking about biological disease then questions of the immune system and general health factors are considered, but what is the immune system of the psyche? The fifth analogy is “channels of infection” in which it is stated that some illnesses are spread more easily through one medium rather than another; is the same true of imitative acts? Finally, the sixth analogy is titled “quarantine” a person with tuberculosis was placed in a sanitarium; is there a means of quarantining the population from harmful imitative causes (1980)? These analogies lend themselves specifically to the study of Queer youth suicide.

Looking at the analogies in the Queer youth suicide context it can be asked is there an incubation period between the multiple negative images from a homophobic

society and a Queer youth killing him/herself? What factors might influence one youth to follow a self-destructive path to suicide but not another? What are the specific germs or bacteria to return to biological model that cause Queer youth suicide? What is the immune system for the psyche? According to Durkheim (1951), in the discussion of suicide, the support from the family and having a strong religious belief could be considered as a part of this immune system. It was Durkheim's position that isolation, often seen in the lack of familial support, was a leading component in who becomes suicidal. In their theories of Queer identity formation, Cass (1979, 1986), and Troiden (1989), found isolation to be a leading component in the early stages of development; they also both suggested that it is in these early stage when an individual is most prone to suicide. It might be speculated that the lack of immunity to the suggestion of suicide is the absence of systemic supports for the young Queer in a homophobic society.

In 1982, David Phillips partnered with Kenneth Bollen to revisit the data on imitative suicides. In the resulting paper the two discuss their methods, analysis, and data. Their purpose in conducting this additional research was to replicate Phillips' earlier finding on the imitative effect of suicide, to determine if examining a different media as the announcer of the original suicide made a difference to the resulting imitation, and, to try to more accurately determine the length of time between the original suicide and the imitation set. Using televised reports of individual suicides during the period 1972-1976, they found support for Phillips original work. Because the first study used monthly suicide data there was a possibility that the spike in suicides had occurred prior to what had been believe to be the primary suicide. Using daily suicide data from the U. S.

national Center for Health Statistics and a compellation of evening news stories provided by the *Vanderbilt Television News Index* a specific pattern between primary and secondary suicides was found. That is, there was a spike in suicides during the seven to ten day period following a televised report of a suicide.

The question of the influence of media, specifically rock video and music, on attitudes about suicide was approached by Rustad, et al., (2003) in a study conducted and reported in their article, "The impact of rock videos and music with suicidal content on thoughts and attitudes about suicide". In the first experiment, college psychology student, were shown a video of a rock group. The experimental group was shown a video containing highly stylized suicide; while the control group was shown a concert by the same rock group. Following the video, both sets of participants were asked first how they were feeling emotionally on a scale of one to ten. Then they were asked to write reflections on three presented photographs which had the possibility of extracting suicidal themes. The researchers evaluated the writing as to suicidal content. The researchers felt that minimal difference in the responses between the experimental and control groups could be the fault of the video used which they identified as very stylized presentation of a song with lyrics which were difficult to understand.

In a second experiment the researchers, still using college psychology students as subjects, had two groups listening to and reading lyrics from three rock songs. The experimental group's lyrics were clearly suicidal while the control groups made no suicidal suggestion. Both groups were again evaluated and executed written responses. The researchers' finding were that both experiments had a greater percentage of suicide

idealization in the written responses of the experimental groups but it was felt that there was no effect in the emotional response to the material.

The only demographic provided in the article was the gender makeup of the two experiments. There was no discussion as to the social-economic class, race/ethnicity or ages of the participants. This might be problematic for the study because there was no attempt to make the content, video or lyrics, more personal to the student subjects. Others (Bollen & Phillips, 1982; Phillips, 1974, 1980; Phillips & Carstensen, 1986; Stack, 1987, 1990) who have written on imitative suicide have pointed to the influence of the imitator identifying with the original suicide in regard to features such as gender, or marital status.

In 1986, Phillips and Cartensen tackled the issue of teenage suicides noting that the suicides of teenagers appear to cluster. Using nationally televised news stories and the print media they found that from zero to seven days after the publishing of a suicide there was an increase in suicides by teenagers. A determining factor was the more highly publicized the story of the original suicide the greater number of teenage imitators. In addition, the increase in teen suicides was greater than the increase in the same period of adult suicides. The authors' comment on this is worth noting: "This finding is consistent with the widespread belief that teenagers are more susceptible than adults to fads, fashions, and imitation" (p. 689). The issue of susceptibility will be addressed in more detail when considering the effect of film on the viewing public.

While attention to teenage imitative suicide based on an original news article was considered above, Gould and Shaffer (1986) specifically researched the possible effect of teenage imitative suicide and the media. In a localized study in New York, they found

that following televised fictional depictions of suicide in 1984-1985 there was an increase in attempted and completed suicides among teenagers. Ironically, the intent of the four broadcasts was suicide prevention; yet, the findings were that during the two weeks following the broadcast there was an increase in teenage suicides as compared to the two weeks prior to the broadcasts. However, the authors felt that imitative suicide among teenagers was a possibility but had not been proven in their study. There were several reasons for their lack of confidence in their findings. First, the sample was small and localized, covering youth under the age of 19 residing in the greater New York area. Secondly, the researchers were comparing attempted suicides in the week before and the week after each of the four broadcast. However, due to the timing of the first and second broadcasts, there was no possibility for a “before” period due to the overlap in the broadcasting of the two programs. Therefore no before and after comparison could be made for the second program. Then there were concerns that various hospitals used different criteria in identifying a suicide attempt. In addition, there was a possibility of inflation in the number of attempts because parents, being more aware of the problem due to seeing the broadcasts brought their children to the hospital for a suicide attempt that without the broadcasts would have been handled differently. Finally, there was also more awareness of youth suicide following the broadcasts among medical examiners that may have identified ambiguous deaths as suicide which during a different period might have been considered accidental. The major difficulty in studying suicide is the absence of collaboration of cause and effect by the individuals who “successfully” complete the process. Even in cases where an individual leaves a suicide note, the causation is

inconclusive due to the additional societal factors not included or considered by the victim.

Finally, the book *Current concepts of suicide* (1990) includes a chapter written by Steven Stack entitled “Media impacts on suicide” which also contains research on the main focus of this thesis, the possible correlation between film and Queer youth suicide. Stack begins by providing an overview of the research on imitative suicide, and concludes with a call for more research on some of these topics, such as the effect of real suicides instead of fictional works on imitative suicide, and the factors influencing identification of the imitator with the original perpetrator. He starts his review with the statement, “First, there is considerable debate over whether or not media stories have to deal with real persons, as opposed to fictional persons, in order to have an effect” (p.107). He continues this discussion referencing several studies that point to fictional accounts of suicide having no imitative effect. However, in the last paragraph he identifies a study done in Germany that does support a connection between a fictional work and imitative suicides. “One study that does support an imitation effect is that done in West Germany by Schmidtke and Hafner (1986). “The authors found that a publicized, six-part television film series, ‘Death of a Student’, was significantly associated with increases in suicide (p.109)”. Further on in the article, Stack adds that Schmidtke and Hafner found the program had its most powerful effect on young males (p.111).

Stack continues his review with the topic “Research on audience identification with the suicide victim”. Here he reviews some of the work cited above and discusses the

effect of celebrity suicides on suicide rates. In this his discussion he states something of particular interest to this study when he states:

A recent study implies that imitation effects may be strongest for young people. Phillips and Carstensen (1986) found that the incident of teenage suicide increased after television news stories on suicide. The stories, however, involved very few teenage victims. This suggests that age identification—at least for American teenagers—may not be important; *they identify with aspects of the suicide victim other than the victim's age.* (emphasis added) (p.111)

The above quote raises the question, what factors of the identity of the original model might influence an imitation suicide? More specifically, could mainstream film be a contributing factor when those with whom you identify continually end up dead by the final reel of the film.

Film

This section evaluates the construct of motion pictures: what is their purpose, what is their influence, and how does the audience read them especially those they marginalize? The emphasis is on mainstream Hollywood film that is many things to many people. To the people who own the studios, cinema is a business with the primary purpose of making money, the more money the better (Nowell-Smith, 1997). To the audience who pays money to view film, the primary function of film is entertainment. And, for those who study film, the critics, scholars and students, film is life, and life in film can be found in the art, the style, and the implicit meaning (Giroux, 2002). However, for the purpose of this study, while film is understood to be an entertainment business,

the emphasis will be on the hegemonic aspects of film. As an audience, particularly the Queer or questioning members, what do we learn either consciously or subconsciously from being “entertained” by a Hollywood film; and why might that be a concern? As Giroux (2002) suggests:

The problem of movies is not that they can be understood in multiple ways, but how some meanings have a force that other meanings do not: that is, how some meanings gain a certain legitimacy and become the defining terms of reality because of how well they resonate and align under certain conditions with broader discourses, dominant ideologies, and existing material relations of power (pp.12-13).

The power of the hegemonic messages in all media but especially film must be included when considering its effect on marginalized populations.

Hollywood and those who study film have long understood that the audience in addition to be entertained may also be effected by film in other ways; there are messages that we take away from the viewing of a film (Tropiano, 2009). Because the significance of what we ingest from viewing a film is so important to this study several diverse experts will be quoted in support of the idea that film teaches about all aspects of life; beginning with the industry itself.

In the preamble to the Motion Picture Code of 1930, this recognition of potential effect is identified as a responsibility of the industry. The code reads:

Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.

(Tropiano, 2009, p.271)

Although the writers of the preamble to the code did not specify what form “of teaching or propaganda” they were concerned with in film, they appeared aware of the power of motion pictures to teach. The code, which is addressed in more detail below, was written due to worry about film corrupting the country’s morals. This concern based in the issue of morality raises the question; just what type of knowledge do we obtain at the movies?

While discussing the influence of media on our meaning making abilities a reprise of the quote from Professor Douglas Kellner (2003) seems appropriate. He states:

Radio, television, film, and the other products of media culture provides materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, our ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (p. 9).

People who view media as solely entertainment disbelieve his position that the power of the media is instrumental to how we define ourselves. Nevertheless, film is so much more than simply entertainment and Kellner is not the only one who views the power of film as formative.

Feminist author, professor, and critic bell hooks, in her book *Reel to Real: Race, sex and class at the movies* (1996) identifies film as an instrument of pedagogy. She states, “Whether we like it or not, cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people. It may not be the intent of a filmmaker to teach audiences anything, but that does not mean that lessons are not learned” (p. 2). Additionally, she states that film is such a powerful teacher that she uses it as a tool to explain concepts about race, power, and gender. She finds that students who felt they could not understand a theory when it was presented in lecture or a book; are able to deconstruct the same elements when viewed through a film. For example, Professor hooks will use a film as the starting point for dialogue about class or race and finds that film gives students a common ground from which to speak.

The idea of film as a basis for classroom discussion from a common ground for issues such as racism, classism or homophobia is also supported by educator Henry Girox; who agrees with hooks and expands her discussion of the pedagogical aspects of film which he identifies as “public pedagogies” (2002, p.6). For Girox, an important lesson taken from film analysis is the power relationship that becomes available to the viewer through a deeper reading of the film. It is Girox position that film is the most powerful of media as a pedagogical tool because of the time commitment a viewer makes to a film. Unlike television, a film usually absorbs the viewer for an hour or more and without commercial interruptions.

Professor Carlos Cortés in *The children are watching: How the media teach about diversity* (2000) agrees with the assessments of both hooks (1996) and Girox (2002) concerning the power of film as a pedagogical tool. His concern regarding this power focuses on what children are learning by watching film. It was while teaching multiculturalism to student teachers that he began his study of the influence of film on children; he states in the preface, “As I increasingly recognized the enormous pedagogical implications of the media” (p. xv). Cortés presents an amusing and yet frightening example of the knowledge of schoolchildren on what it means to be a Gypsy (2000). It is his position that the media is teaching children about the “other”, who they are and what particular characteristics they exhibit. These characteristics, are the stereotypes that film uses to portray groups of people; often, the viewer may think they know what an individual is “like” from generalizing what has been learned from the stereotypes in film (Cortés, 2000).

Corber (2011) while discussing the diminished influence of film during the Cold War era due to the rise in popularity of television, states, “Hollywood cinema remained one of the most powerful ideological apparatuses in American society for reproducing normative gender and sexual identities” (p.5). Here, he is specifying what is learned from mainstream Hollywood film—nothing less than the hegemonic constructs of how we perform sexuality and gender.

Finally, in the relationship of meanings derived from film to Queer identity development, in an article entitled “Invisibility, homophobia and

heterosexism: Lesbians, gays and the media” by Fejes and Petrich (1993), they question, “How do media images and meanings create definitions of homosexuality, homosexuals, and the homosexual community, and *what are the consequences*” (emphasis added, p. 396)? It is the specific consequences this paper intends to consider: what is the learning if one is struggling with a Queer identity and searching for role models and the role models you find in movies are either someone with whom you have no wish to identify or dead by the last reel?

Hollywood as meaning maker: Stereotyping the “other”

Mainstream Hollywood narrative follows a formula. Specifically, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end; with a tendency to move forward in time in a linear approach. At the start of the film, the viewer is introduced to the characters and understands where they are in time and space and the direction the film intends to go. During the middle of the film, a problem is presented to the protagonist that he/she labors to decipher; and at the conclusion of the film the problem is resolved (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009; Sikov, 2010). Also, the vast majority of Hollywood motion picture will contain a heterosexual love interest regardless of the film’s genre (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004).

Films are also categorized by genre; this allows the audience to anticipate viewing particular attributes when seeing a specific genre of film. For example, when entering a theatre to see a Western the viewer anticipates, cowboys, guns, horses and good triumphing over evil (Buscomb, 1997; Sikov, 2010). In addition, because of the limited time a film takes, formulas are also used so the audience

can identify the various types of characters associated in the film. Normally, these characteristics are called signifiers or stereotypes; they act as a short hand to allow the audience to have some background on the character without spending valuable film time, which could be spent on developing and resolving the elements of the plot (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Dyer, 1983).

The problem with stereotypes is that they become clichés and the audience tends to generalize from the particular traits of the portrayal of a movie character to all actual people of this group (Cortés, 2000; Dyer 2002). This is especially damaging if a particular group is consistently stereotyped negatively; and an analytical viewing of Hollywood film provides generalizations that “the other”, i.e. people of color, women, and Queers are rarely the heroes, often the villains, victim, or sidekick (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Gross, 2001; Manuel, 2009). Davis and Smith (2000) go so far as to identify the Queer as the furthest marginalized group in twentieth century America. They state, “Like blackness, but more structurally than visibly, gayness stood for the ultimate other, against which normativity could be understood” (p.109). The position of Queers in films then is a support for the hegemony of heterosexuality (Gross, 2001).

Various terms are used to identify the connotative Queer; the character is categorized usually as the “pansy” or “sissy” (Benshoff & Griffin 2004; Russo, 1987). While the attributes ascribe to him may differ, he is always recognizable by the knowledgeable viewer. Some of the attributes are “effete appearance and hyperaffected air” (Barrios, 2003, p.100) or a “spoiled and effete cruelty” (Sakeris, 2001). In *Queer*

Images Benshoff & Griffin (2006) discuss that the signifiers of the sissy are not limited to characterization but are present in the complete mise-en-scene; props, dialogue, costume and even music can denote the presence of the Queer. When these items are used in conjunction with each other, the implications of queerness would be difficult for a sophisticated film viewer to miss. Dyer (1983) adds that certain topics of dialogue indicate a Queer sensibility; he includes loneliness for both gays and lesbians, an artistic sensibility for gay males and sports for gay females.

The consistent signifiers of the gay male, as Russo (1987), points out are not only the effeminate walk and the limp wrist; but also an intellectualism, a tendency for contemplation instead of action, which identifies a male as homosexual. As an aside, Russo's inclusion of intellectualism as a signifier of queerness is an interesting commentary on the value America places on intelligence. Russo was identifying this quality in the male "other" in the early parts of the twentieth century but it can also be perceived in more recent films such as *Philadelphia* (1993) and *In and Out* (1997) discussed below.

The signifier of lesbians in film can be summed up as mannishness, a woman who is not overly feminine or overly attractive and who speaks in a forthright manner is often signifying a lesbian character. However, as Dyer (1983) suggests while Queers in general may be "seen as tragic, pathetic, wretched, despicable, comic or ridiculous figures [it is] the dyke who is frequently represented as dangerous and threatening" (p.12). Russo (1987) would add to this that the portrayal of Queers in film has a firm base in sexism. The lesbian in being more than a woman becomes a threat to the power of the male. A

final sexism note would be, just as there are more roles for men in film, there are also more portrayals of Queer men than of Queer woman; and ultimately an inequality in film analysis of the Queer male than of the Queer female.

History of Queer representation in Hollywood film

For the purpose of this study, the history of a Queer representation in Hollywood film is divided into four periods: Pre Code-1895 to 1934; Code- 1934 to 1968; Post Code- 1968 to 1990s; and 1990's to the present. The designation "Code" refers to the Motion Picture Code, which was very influential in the portrayal of Queer people in film. The use of "the code" as a demarcation between cinema periods is not a solid separation as there is blending of images and ideas between the periods. For example, the pre Code period is identified as ending in 1934, when in fact the Code was accepted by the industry in 1930 but was not fully in effect until 1934 (Tropiano, 2009). In addition, Queer stereotypes that were prevalent during one period, i.e. Pre Code, can still be found in present day film.

The Queer influence on film and the Queer reading of film transcends the history of cinema; there have always been Queer people in the motion picture industry as well as Queer viewer at the movies (Barrios, 2003; Benschhoff & Griffin, 2004; Doty, 1993; Mann, 2001).

The discussion of the history of the Queer in mainstream Hollywood film needs to begin with the pioneer and most influential Queer film historian, Vito Russo, author of the *Celluloid Closet* (1987), and by extension the film (1995) of the same name. The film, *Celluloid Closet* (1995) directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, expands on

the book with post 1987 examples and interviews while remaining true to Russo's text. Most authors on Queer film and Queer film theory mention Russo and his book as the foundation upon which they are building by using terms such as "groundbreaking" (Sakeris, 1981, p. 222), "invaluable" (Barrios, 2003, p.5) or "a thorough history" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006, p.14). The criticism leveled against Russo and his book is that it is political in nature, written in an angry, chatty tone with a focus on the negative images of gays and lesbians and how homophobic these representations are (Bronski, 2008; Schiavi, 2009). Russo (1987) was concerned with how the portrayal of gay and lesbian people in film affected the perceptions of the viewers of the films, both those of the dominant sexuality and those not.

Russo's distress lay in the roles portraying the Queer person were often secondary to the film and the character often ended up dead. As Hepworth points out; "Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* amply documents the rivers of gay blood that Hollywood has had occasion to wash its hands in" (1995, p. 193). The anger of which Russo is now accused has to do with watching homophobic, degrading images of Queer people who die in film after film after film. He stresses the repeated deaths in an appendix to his book where he includes a Necrology identifying the statues of the character at the end of the film and, how he/she died. This list, which identifies 39 films released from 1919 to 1983 containing 43 Queer characters, is categorically divided between suicides-13, and murders-28, with one dying of old age and another being executed. In the twenty-four intervening years, much has changed about the portrayal of Queers in films and yet, much remains the same in the termination of the Queer character by the end of the film. The

question of the impact this has on the viewer also remains, as Davies (2008) states in his introduction: “These images of tormented individuals left a lasting legacy, as they not only told straight people what to think about gay people but also gay people what to think about themselves” (p.13).

Pre Code: 1895 to 1934

When discussing Queer cinema, one of the first moving images made in 1895 is of two men dancing together, this piece of film is frequently entitled *The Gay Brothers* (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Davies, 2008; Russo, 1987). It is unknown what the intent behind this particular image is but it does capture a very Queer representation, in the unusualness of two men dancing together. During the early silent era, there were images of the Queer cowboy who pranced his way to an easy laugh; alongside multiple images of men cross-dressing. How did these images come to signify Queer and why were they considered funny (Benshoff & Griffin, 2005; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Russo, 1987)?

Russo (1987), contends “It is supposed to be an insult to call a man effeminate, for it means he is like a woman and therefore not as valuable as a ‘real’ man” (p. 4). So humor in early film can be found in the effeminate man commonly identified as the “sissy” or in the “real” man who is pretending to be a woman. Both types of humor support the hegemonic notion of the superiority of the male; and, not surprisingly, both types continue into films of the twenty-first century.

In both silent films and the early talkies, there were many overt Queer portrayals; Fejes & Petrich (1993), mention not only cross-dressing and the sissy but also the role

reversal. The role reversal film mentioned by both Fejes & Petrich (1993), and Russo (1987) was made in 1914 and entitled *A Florida Enchantment*, and is significant in what it suggests about gender roles in American film; mainly, that the concept of role reversals was queer and too silly to be believable.

The cross-dressing films typically mentioned during this period include several by Fatty Arbuckle, made particularly in 1917, as well as Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman* (1915). The humor of these two examples varies; Fatty Arbuckle in his female portrayals donned a wig and did nothing else to make himself appear more "feminine"; the humor then resided in this obvious male in drag being pursued by other men. The Chaplin film, on the other hand, while still humorous, contained an additional and deeper depiction of the feminine and what it meant to be a woman in 1915. Russo (1987) sees this portrayal as a move toward the androgynous, another form of Queer. If the audience were not already aware, that Chaplin was the "woman" in the title he could easily have passed.

The sexism of which Russo (1987) speaks when discussing the humor of a Queer depiction can best be understood in the response to filmic cross-dressing of women as opposed to men. A simple summation would be—when women cross-dressed they became more than women while when a man cross-dressed he became less of a man; the sexism resides in the character not performing their gender properly. An atypical gender performance could be a threat but when done in jest these Queer readings were humorous to a patriarchal audience (Sandler, 2001). There were, of course, more depictions of male cross-dressing than of women but the notable examples of women include some of the greater stars of the era: Katharine Hepburn in *Sylvia Scarlett* (1936), Marlene Dietrich in

Morocco (1930), and Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* (1933). Of the three portrayals, it is in *Sylvia Scarlet* (1936) with Katharine Hepburn, which deals with the plot twist of mistaken identity. In *Sylvia Scarlett* (1936), the humor occurs when Hepburn dressed as Sylvester is perused by a woman but finds herself attracted to a man. While, on the other hand, with the cross dressing of both Dietrich and Garbo there is no attempt to pass as the other gender, here the women are clearly women dressed in male apparel.

Considering Dietrich and Garbo, if Foucault had been a film critic he might have written about these two films in regard to the Queer sexual power dynamic revealed in support of heterosexuality. In both films, the women incorporate the male power in their cross-dressing, and what is Queer about the character is her wearing of male attire and the freedom with which that attire empowers her. For example, in *Morocco* (1930), Dietrich, as a performer in a cabaret, appears dressed in a tuxedo, there is no illusion that she is male only that she is dressed as a male; she then takes male privilege and kisses a women audience member on the lips. The woman-to-woman kiss is a shockingly Queer thing to do, especially in 1930 (Sakeris, 2001). However, her intent in the film is to attract and inflame the heterosexual love interest, in this case Gary Cooper (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Russo, 1987).

Film audiences of the 1930s were titillated by these images of female stars that appear as more than mere women. An additional Queer factor for Garbo and Dietrich was their personal lives, although not publicly acknowledged, might have paralleled the Queer personas they were playing in these films (Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Gross, 2001; Walters, 1995). However, for a male to be similarly depicted dressed as a woman and

then kissing another man would be impossible under not only the code but also equally impossible if the actor was of the star caliber of Garbo or Dietrich. No male star would dare play such a role for fear of the homophobic backlash and the ruin of his career. Even today, it is difficult to induce a male star to take a Queer role for fear of being typecast. One of the few example of a male star cross dressing during the period of the Code would be Cary Grant in *Bringing up Baby* (1938) where the plot call for a brief appearance in an effeminate kimono; and when he is questioned about his attire he responds, “he’s ‘just gone gay all of a sudden” (Russo, 1987, p. 47).

Russo (1987) among others (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004) discusses the gender inversion used to depict the homosexual male. While Dyer (1983) identifies a typography of Queer male images in film, similar to those identified by Bogle (1992) in regard to African Americans. Dyer names the images “in-betweenism”, “the macho”, and the “sad young man” (pp. 6-15). The in-betweenism is the “pansy” or “sissy” also identified in *The Celluloid Closet*, both book (1987) and film (1995). An example discussed by both film and book is found in the short film from 1912 entitled, *Algie, the Miner*. The characteristics mentioned include: “the dandified air, fluttering hands, pursed and apparently rouged lips, sly smile and eyes that he bats” (2003, p. 17); and so there can be no doubt as to the gender inversion depicted here, during the film Algie kisses another man in gratitude for not being shot. While Barrios in his discussion of this film, states that the director was a woman, Alice Guy-Blaché; and, she used all of these stereotypes to assist the audience in identifying the character as “sissy”.

This early depiction of the “sissy” in *Algie, the Miner* (1912) continued with the growth of film. Film historians identify many characters during the early silent films into the first talking films with similar “sissy” types until the visual signifiers became commonplace. As the industry grew, the competition between the studios became more intense, each attempting to outdo the others in the realm of spectacle. The envelope of “decency” was pushed further in what was brought to the screen. Once the Great Depression occurred, the competition for an audience became even more intense and consequently even more blatant in the depiction of sexuality in an endeavor to bring more people back into the movie houses (Barrios, 2003). However, the guardians of morality were observing and objecting to the “inappropriate” images appearing on the screen; and then Cecil B. DeMille made the film *The Sign of the Cross*, (1928).

It was depiction of “deviance, perversion and decadence” (Fejes & Pertich, 1993, p. 397) that flamed the fires of censorship, which was to come under the Code and through the Legend of Decency. As Walsh (1996) points out it is difficult to blame the complete rise in censorship on just one film; however, the unique blend of paganism and sexuality that was depicted in DeMille’s film whose title names a daily observance of practicing Catholics had potential for a major reaction. Moreover, a major reaction was what the film and the industry received. Many Catholic clergy condemned the film for 148 feet of film that depict the testing of a Christian virgin by a group of undulating pagan women attempting to sexually inflame her (Russo, 1987; Walsh, 1996). It became clear to the Church that the film industry had to be stopped from destroying the morals of

the country. The Code, which had been in place since 1930, would now be strictly enforced for the sake of the American public.

Code: 1934 to 1968

The Code, formally known as The Production Code Administration (PCA), was a means of Hollywood self-censoring instead of being censored by a public institute created by Congress. The PCA was established in 1930 and began to fully censor content of film in 1934. It continued as a branch of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), from 1934 until it was disbanded in 1968. Under the agreement of the members of the MPPDA a film would not be released without having received the “seal of approval” from the PCA. A variety of content would result in the “seal of approval” being withheld (Tropiano, 2009). Displaying or discussing abortion, adultery, birth control, and divorce were a few of the subjects that were forbidden, as was any form of “sexual perversion”. Over the next 30 plus years additional issues were considered inappropriate as subject matter for film but the topic of “sexual perversion” remained constant (Walsh, 1996).

It was also in 1934 that the Catholic Legion of Decency was the most powerful of the groups calling on Congress to control the content of the movies. Tropiano, (2009) quotes the Church’s position on movies as follows: “the pest hole [Hollywood] that infects the entire country with its obscene and lascivious moving pictures must be cleaned and disinfected” (p. 53). The Legion of Decency did not have the power to stop films from being produced but they did have the ability to affect a film’s profit by prohibiting good Catholics from attending a film they found objectionable (Walsh, 1996).

The censorship of the Code worked in conjunction with the rating system of the Legion of Decency. Hollywood studios did not want to risk having a film condemned by the Legion of Decency and used the Code to insure content they would consider acceptable. As Barrios (2003) states when discussing the elimination of Queer characters from film due to the power of the Legend of Decency and the Code: “The public taste, even the public good, is in the opinionated hands of a few” (p. 126). Consequently, the presence of the overt Queer of the early 1930s became the hidden covert Queer for the duration of the code. What is meant by a covert Queer is the portrayal of a character as the other; a marginalized person who carries the signifiers of the Queer specifically the “sissy” or the “dyke”. The script never states that this character is the sexual deviant, but many in the audience can read the stereotypical features that distinguish the Queer.

This is affirmed by Russo while discussing the invisibility of the connotative Queer during the years of the code: “Technically, homosexuals were just as invisible onscreen as they were in real life. They continued to emerge, however, as subtextual phantoms representing the very fear of homosexuality (p. 93)”. Such a representation of the fear engendered by the covert Queer can be seen in *All about Eve* (1950) discussed by Russo (1987) and revisited by Corber in an article in 2005 and a book in 2011. As Corber points out, “Eve is one of a long line of predatory celluloid lesbians” (2005, p.2). He continues by listing additional roles of “mannish” women who manipulate and prey upon other weaker females; typifying the stereotype of the lesbian during this period. In addition, he identifies *All about Eve* (1950) as a particular genre labeled Cold War films. In the lesbian portrayal of this period, the mannish butch stereotype was present but the

real threat came from the less stereotypical femme. At the beginning of the film Eve is portrayed as a mannish butch to identify her as lesbian while throughout the rest of the film she is portrayed as a femme. This becomes particularly disturbing and frightening for the audience because the character of Eve passes as a heterosexual woman. Eve becomes symbolizes not only the dangerous lesbian but also the communist sympathizer, how is an upstanding, straight American to know who to trust (Corber, 2011)? Benschhoff and Griffin (2006) add the publication of the Kinsey Report in 1948 contributed to the fear of the dominant sexual orientation that not all Queer people looked or acted stereotypically Queer.

In addition to the connotative Queer the studios bought properties which contained a blatant lesbian or gay theme. What were they to do in producing a film that encompassed such a theme? When the MGM studios bought the rights to Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour*, the censors made it clear that the film would make no reference to lesbianism; and that the original title could not be used because of its known relationship to lesbianism (Faderman, 1991). Consequently, in 1936 William Wyler directed the film, *These Three*, which kept the characters and setting of the original play but changed the pivotal element of the plot to a lie about two women fighting over a man (Benschhoff & Griffin, 2006; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Gross, 2001).

Male's depicting the Queer during the period of the 1940s and 1950s appear as sad, lonely, isolated, (Dyer, 1983, 2002) shunned and dead by the end of the film (Gross, 2001). Many identify *Rebel Without a Cause* as an example (Russo, 1987). The character of Plato played by Sal Mineo is the prototypical sad young man. Years later Sal Mineo

identified Plato as “the first gay teenager in films” making it clear that he had no doubt about the sexual orientation of the character he played in the film (Hadleigh, 1986).

What the audience learns through the film’s dialogue is: his wealthy parents have left him with the housekeeper, he has no friends, and, as his fascination/idealization of Jim shows us his sexual orientation is other than heterosexual. The character of Plato is never explicitly identified as Queer however there are indications, including, a photo of Alan Ladd taped to the inside of his school locker. Dyer (1983, 2002) identifies the sad young man type with iconography of the martyr. And, as a martyr, it is with Plato’s death that the film ends.

Post Code: 1968 to 1990s

Sexual perversion was but one of the items forbidden by the Code. Others included husband and wife being shown to sleep in the same bed or the exposure of too much cleavage. The other items listed as prohibited by the code fell by the wayside one by one until only sexual deviance; the depiction of the Queer was left. Then, in 1962, with the making of *Advise and Consent* and *The Children’s Hour* that last bastion of “appropriateness” in film fell as well, and the overt Queer returned to the screen. However, the portrayal of those who were gay and lesbian depicted tortured individuals, subject to blackmail, and filled with self-loathing to the point of suicide. The Queer could be included in film finally, but they must be condemned (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004).

In *The Children’s Hour*, the character Martha Dobie, after realizing she does have sexual feelings which could be identified as lesbian for her fellow teacher, says “I feel so damn sick and dirty I can’t stand it anymore” (Russo, 1987, p. 139); being unable to view

any other possibilities for herself she proceeds to hang herself. While in *Advise and Consent*, Senator Brig Anderson, realizing his political career is over due being blackmailed for a youthful gay experience, uses a straight razor to kill himself. Queers images were back in film but they were definitely not allowed the typical Hollywood “happy ending”. In October 1961 the code had been amended to permit the inclusion of homosexual themes in Hollywood film, however, the studios were admonished to do so with “care, discretion and restraint” (as quoted in Barrios, 2003, p. 303). Hollywood interpreted these words to mean Queer people could be shown but they could not live happy lives and it would be best if they were dead before the end of the film. Yet, following 1962 more Queer people brought their dramas to the screen.

Reviewing the literature for Queer characters in films during the late 1960s usually includes *The Killing of Sister George* (1968) and *Boys in the Band* (1970) (Barrios, 2003; Benschhoff & Griffin, 2004, 2006; Russo, 1987). Benschhoff and Griffin (2006) discuss the many similarities between the two films; with both moving from the stage to film, both having been directed by heterosexual males who manage to still capture a culture in which they have no membership, and both identify issues of the closet and its corollary, the possibility of blackmail. They are also remarkable because while portraying multiple Queer characters all of the characters are still alive at the end of the film.

The main character in *The Killing of Sister George* (1968) may not be the kind of person one would like to use as role model, for example, George is a sadist who forces her lover Childie to eat a cigar butt. As Jewelle Gomez points out the film is “not a pretty

picture of lesbians, but it's a gritty, compelling close-up of people" (1999, p. 168). It is this depth beyond the stereotypes that makes this film convincing. This conviction comes from the character George having redeeming features; she can be seen as a multidimensional character who is a part of a larger community, she displays a sense of humor and most importantly is accepting of her lesbianism. When her persona as an out and proud woman is too much for her employer she loses her job and her lover but maintains her pride in her lesbian identity and her sense of self (Russo, 1987).

While discussing the career of character actor Agnes Moorehead, White (1995) draws parallels between Moorehead and character of Sister George. She identifies a theme in *The Killing of Sister George* as the hidden identity of character actor as Queer. The parallels she includes between the real Moorehead and the fictional "George" are both being television character actors who are beloved by the viewing public, and both end their careers playing the disembodied voice of an animal after years on the screen. Could this be seen as another means of returning a visible lesbian to the closet?

Queers in Postmodern Film, 1990s to the present day

The effect of the closet is of major importance to the work of Seidman (2002) entitled *Beyond the closet: The transformation of gay and lesbian life*. As a means of looking at the treatment of the Queer in America during the last 40 years of the twentieth century, Seidman (2002) approached the study of film as a means of looking at heterosexism. His conclusion, after analyzing approximately 50 films, was that film

continued the hegemonic negation of heterosexism in two very specific ways. The first he identifies as the polluted homosexual and he says,

I've concluded that for most of these years heterosexual dominance worked by polluting homosexuality. The homosexual was viewed as such a despicable and disgusting figure that no one would want to openly declare herself a homosexual. Conversely, the heterosexual was defined as a pure and ideal status. Moreover, to the extent that homosexuals were imagined as predators, child molesters, disease spreaders, or cultural subversives, the state and other social institutions were given a broad social mandate to protect respectable citizens by purging America of any signs of homosexuality (p.13).

The stereotypical images that Seidman mentions were visible in mainstream American films during the period from 1960 until the mid-1990s. The means of "purging" this Queer scourge was death of the Queer before the end of the film (Russo, 1985; Seidman, 2002). Over time, the concept of the polluted homosexual was joined by a new, kinder concept, the "normal" homosexual, kinder but still an image still in the service of supporting heterosexual hegemony.

In the mid-1990s, a change in the iconography of Queers in Hollywood film occurred. Several theorists (Dean, 2007; Rushton & Bettinson, 2010; Seidman, 2002) identify this change as the "normalizing" of the Queer. A variety of Hollywood films were released which had characters who were not deviant killers or child molesters; they were just average people much like the members of the dominant culture. However, many Queer film theorists (Dean, 2007; Hanson, 1999; Rushton & Bettinson, 2010;

Seidman, 2002) were less than pleased with the concept of Queers being mostly just like non-Queers. Dean (2007) points out that since the 1990s some mainstream Hollywood films have include a normalized Queer character. However, this character is separated from the Queer subculture and is portrayed as the almost equal other. The portrayal of this character still supports and upholds the heteronormative Hollywood ideal of family and heterosexual marriage. Queer theorists are unsettled by this tacit support for the status quo; the focus of Queer theory is after all the destabilization of the restrictive concepts of the binaries of Queer/non-Queer, male/female, married/not married, etc.

Two filmic examples of the “normal” Queer can be identified in the drama, *Philadelphia* (1993), and comedy, *In and Out* (1997) (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Dean, 2007; Rushton & Bettinson, 2010; Seidman, 2002). Seidman identifies *Philadelphia* (1993) as an exceptional film in its having been made by a major studio, starring well-known actors, and it compassionately depicts discrimination against a gay man with AIDs. It is also an example of what Seidman discusses of the transformation of the character of Andy from “polluted” to “normal” statues. This transformation can be perceived in the relationship between Andy and Joe, his lawyer in his Aids discrimination / wrongful termination suit. As the film opens with Andy searching for a lawyer who will take his case Joe reacts to Andy’s polluted statues by dropping his hand when he hears he has Aids and stepping back. At the end of the film when Andy is dying Joe sits on his hospital bed having moved to the recognition of Andy’s “normality”; or if you will his humanity. It is not a coincidence that the working title for the film was *People like us*

(Davies & Smith, 2000). It is this persistent reinforcing of heteronormative through the story of Andy's defeat of the corporate bigots that ends up most apparent. Andy is the loved son of two heterosexual parents, the loved brother of several heterosexual siblings, and finally the respected client of the heterosexual attorney. We are shown the heteronormative family and institutions aiding the almost "normal" Andy. As Seidman (2004) states: "In the ideal society imagined in *Philadelphia*, discrimination toward gays would be uncivil—that's the message of Andy's legal victory. However, the culture and institutions of American would remain organized around heterosexual privilege (p.137)". Typical of mainstream film, *Philadelphia* does not challenge the status quo one of several things it has in common with *In and Out* for which it was an inspiration (Sakeris, 2001).

In and Out is a coming out story, set in a small town in Indiana where the town's people are accepting and supportive of Howard's, the main character, new found identity practically before he is. Much like *Philadelphia* the heteronormality of the community is not challenged by Howard being gay. The final scene in the film depicts Howard's parents renewing their wedding vows while Howard proudly looks on. As Seidman (2004) theorizes, "*Philadelphia* and *In and Out* substitute an image of the normal gay for the polluted homosexual. However, the norm of heterosexuality remains institutionally secure (p. 140)". This norm of heterosexuality is, of course, completely contradictory to the tenet of Queer theory, which advocates for deconstruction of any line between all sexual orientations. It is the concept of construction and deconstruction that is a primary methodology in animation, one of the queerer genres of film.

Animation

This section on film has analyzed and discussed a variety of mainstream Hollywood films with adult themes and Queer portrayals. This study however, is concerned with the suicide rates of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 many of whom, due to the codes regulating the viewing of film would not be allowed to see most of the film discussed. What children are allowed to see without little restriction would be animation or the cartoons presented as children's entertainment most notably, by Disney or Warner Brothers. A media which has been identifies as having, both a great socialization influence on children (King, Lugo-Lugo, & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2009) and persuasive powers over the values of children (Giroux, 2002). Is it possible that there is a Queer component to these cartoons that are socializing and influencing the viewing child?

Several writers (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Griffin, 2004; Sandler, 2001) who apply Queer theory to film see animation as an extremely Queer art form. They discuss the nature of animation in reflecting and performing reality as well as the fantastic. For example, Griffin (2004) identifies the unreal nature of characters such as Mickey Mouse or Bugs Bunny who are larger than life talking animals who display all of characteristics of the human animal. Wells (2002), while identifying animation with Queer theory additionally supports a Queer reading when he says in his introduction, "Fundamentally, though, animation in the United States has been characterized by a desire to express *difference* and *otherness*" (emphasis in the original, p. 1). This difference or otherness is a basis of the queerness of the cartoon.

Barrios (2003), in his discussion of the “pansy” emphasizes that the early cartoons were not intended for children and were contained many Queer characters, content and signifiers beginning in the 1930s. Many of the Betty Boop cartoons contained “pansy” jokes and depictions of the stereotypical limp wrist. Barrio also mentions that several early Disney films were not for children and followed this Queer iconography as well. It is however, most often Warner Brothers and the Bugs Bunny cartoons that are most often analyzed as Queer.

Griffin (2004) identifies the cross-dressing of Bugs Bunny as a particularly Queer being. This is a position that is also supported by Sandler (2001) who notes that in Warner Brother cartoons the most common depiction of female energy comes from Bugs Bunny, a supposedly male entity. The intent in these depictions is to trivialize the image of women, emphasize gender stereotypes, and teach society’s sexism (Sandler, 2001). Sandler also sees many characteristic of Bug Bunny as stereotypical Queer identifiers. As he states, “Bugs Bunny is rarely coupled with a female character—nor does he express desire for one—in any of his cartoons” (2001, p. 131).

While this depiction of cross-dressing may be sexist and homophobic in making a male entity into a joke through the addition of women’s clothes, can we also find a portrayal of the villainous Queer similar to those found in non-animated film? Doty, while discussing another film entirely, identifies Disney characters and film with specific Queer and villainous sensibility: “the Evil Queen (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*), Cruella de Vil (*101 Dalmatians*), and Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*)” and characterizes these three as “wonderful combinations of straight diva, drag queen and formidable

dyke” (Doty, 2000, p.70). He is not alone in this typing of Disney’s wicked women as lesbians or drag queens (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Sandler, 1998). It is however, in the person of Scar that we find our most recent and murderous cartoon villain.

Although not all theorists agree that Scar is Queer, Griffin (2004) argues for such a reading for the villain in Disney’s *The Lion King* (1994). While Giroux (2002) identifies this animated film as sexist and racist, he does not call it homophobic. He does however, identify Scar as “the suave feline..[with]..a scheming sense of evil and betrayal” (p. 111). And later states, “Scar, who is the icon of evil...speaks with a posh British accent” (p. 120). As discussed above, words such as suave and posh were used as coding for the sissy during the years of the Motion Picture Production Code (Russo, 1987). Corber (2011) while discussing the coding of the gay male in the film *All About Eve* (1950) identifies the character’s Queer signifiers which include “speaks with an upper-crust accent and has a dry bitchy wit (p.44)”. This is a description of the characterization of Scar exactly. Discussing Disney films in general Giroux asserts that Disney “films generally produce a narrow view of family values” (p. 123). The phrase “family values” has been used since the 1960s to identify the threat of Queers to the heteronormative family; its inclusion here echoes a homophobic sentiment.

Cortés (2000) goes further in dismissing the possibility that there is anything Queer about the character Scar in *The Lion King* (1994). He identifies the criticism of Scar’s speaking as “decidedly effeminate” but states that he did not see him as effeminate only “supercilious” using Jeffry Irons voice to “suggest British upper class decadence” and a “self-absorbed elitism”(p. 10). Again, words such as supercilious, decadent and

elite have been used as stereotypical characteristics found in the sissy portrayal (Russo, 1987). Which raises the rhetorical question how many signifiers must be present for the character to be defined as Queer?

While discussing punishment of gender perversion in Disney films, Sandler (1998) identifies Scar as effeminate and therefore, subject to punishment, i.e. death by the film's end. Griffin (2004) specifically lists items which form a very compelling argument in support of Scar, along with other additional *Lion King* (1994) characters, being coded as Queer. His position is that Disney could be seen marketing specifically to Gay men with the hiring of a celebrated gay man, Elton John, writing featured songs for the film and the out, Gay Andres Deja as one of the main animators. Griffin sees the character Zazu, advisor to the king as an obvious Queer character. Griffin identifies Zazu as modeled on Clifton Webb a character actor playing Queers in the 1930 and 1940s. In addition, he feels that Pumbaa and Timon can also be read as Queer.

The problem arises for Queer audiences with the character of Scar, created under lead animator Andres Deja. Scar is personified by his swishy walk, catty cutting remarks which can certainly be read as Queer when she speak in Jeremy Irons' sophisticated, cultured voice. Scar is, of course, the villain in the film who manipulates his brother, the king, into being killed, usurps the throne which causes the veldt to shrivel up and die. Moreover, normalcy is not restored until the heterosexual Simba with his queen at his side returns to rule. While the other Queer characters in *The Lion King* (1994) are not villainous, Scar is portrayed as a Hitler like character in addition to a murderer, who fails to support the heteronormativity of Simba and his father. The conclusion drawn is that it

is ok to be Queer as long as you still are supportive of the heterosexist institution known as the patriarchal family.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this section the question asked by this thesis is the effect that mainstream Hollywood film has on the identity development of Queer youth; particularly asking, is there a possible correlation between the negative images of Queer characters on the movie screen to the disproportionate high rate of suicides among Queer youth? The absence of literature questioning either imitative suicide as a factor in Queer youth suicide rates, or effect of tragic role models in film for Queer people points to a need for additional research.

Since there is no literature to either support or counter this claim; this literature review covered five main topics in the belief that the cumulative effect supports the hypothesis. Of the five topics, Homophobia/Internalized Homophobia; Queer Theory and Queer film theory; Identity Formation in Queer youth; Suicide, chiefly the concepts of Queer youth suicide and imitative suicide; and finally, portrayals of Queer characters in mainstream Hollywood film, the three most pertinent to the thesis question were Queer identity development, suicide particularly, imitative suicide, and Queer representation in mainstream Hollywood film.

In support of a possible correlation between film and Queer suicide, the literature on Queer identity emphasized the vulnerability of Queer youth due to inadequate support during this challenging period in their lives and the possibility of suicide as a response to feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. While identifying Queer youth as possibly

susceptible to suicide, the related section on imitative suicide included examples of media, particularly film being an imitative factor leading to suicide. This section also pointed to a heightened vulnerability of youth in considering or enacting an imitative suicide. Finally, mainstream Hollywood films' treatment of the Queer character was discussed as a pedagogical consideration. In addition, a historical review of film from its beginning up to the last decade of the twentieth century demonstrates a continued lack of positive role models, and a hegemonic display of tragic Queer lives, with a high percentage of dead Queer characters by the final reel of the film. All these factors support consideration of a possible causation between how Queer people are depicted in mainstream Hollywood film and the disproportionately high rate of Queer youth suicides.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to question the ways mainstream Hollywood film has influenced the identity formation of Queer youth. In addition, correlation between the death of the portrayed Queer person in film and the exceptionally high rate of suicides among Queer youth is questioned. This is a qualitative study using narrative inquiry and analyzed through Queer theory to speculate on the effect mainstream Hollywood film has on Queer identity formation. Of particular interest is the impact of the continuous portrayal of negative role models on Queer and questioning youth. The overarching rhetorical questions asked are: What is the subliminal message that the audience receives from the continual deaths of the Queer characters in film after film? What effect do these portrayals have on audiences both Queer and questioning?

As discussed in the statement of the problem, Queer identity formation happens primarily outside the family of origin and is negatively impacted by heteronormative society including the media. The most negative outcome of this marginalizing effect is suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24 (CDC, 2007, p.1) and it is estimated that Queer youth in that age group are three times more likely to commit suicide than their non-Queer peers (D'Augelli, et. al. 2005, Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006). This study using the lens of Queer theory considers how mainstream

Hollywood films negatively affect the identity formation in Queer youth; including factors such as internalized homophobia, negative self-image, and suicide.

In the work of Vivienne C. Cass (1979, 1984) on homosexual identity formation, the author establishes a six-step identity formation model. It is the first two steps in which Cass considers the individual to be most vulnerable. Cass identified the first two steps as, “Identity Confusion” and “Identity Comparison” (1979, p. 222 and 225). It is within these two steps that the individual is most likely to feel isolated, alienated from himself/herself and without support. In referring to the alienation of the second stage, Cass brings up the possibility of the individual seeing suicide as the response to his/her alienation (1979). These would also be the steps in which outside influences might be most detrimental. Thus, steps one and two might be most relevant to this study due to possible negative influence of cinema on Queer identity formation particularly, the potential for imitative suicide.

That Queer youth kill themselves disproportionately to their straight counterparts has been established by the Center for Disease Control. In addition, many experts accept that identity development for Queer youth has additional complications over other identity development. For example, other marginalized groups have the support of family and friends who share their ethnicity or non-dominant religion; however, for the youth who is verbally questioning his/her sexual orientation, these main support systems often turns away. Garber and Archibald (2001) state, “Unfortunately for adolescents who are developing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity, parent-adolescent and family relationships, as a whole, are frequently characterized by negative interactions,

intolerance, and rejection (p. 13)”. They then go on to identify various studies that support that conclusion, citing D’Augelli and Hershberger (1993) who found only 11% of youth who come out to one or more parent received positive response; or Pilkington and D’Augelli (1995) who report because of coming out Queer youth experienced abuse from a family member verbally 33% and physically 10%.

Finally, there is a body of literature that points to discriminatory portrayal of Queer people in mainstream Hollywood films. As the opening words of the documentary *The Celluloid Closet* (1995) state:

In a hundred years of movies, homosexuality rarely was depicted on the screen, and when it did appear, it was depicted as something to laugh at, or to be pitied or feared. These were fleeting images, but they were unforgettable, and they left a lasting legacy. Hollywood, that great maker of myths, taught straight people what to think about gay people and gay people what to think about themselves.

What this thesis explores is the interconnectivity of these concepts; namely, in what ways do films portraying Queer identity promote unhealthy messages for the Queer population? The words and emotions of Queer respondents will lend another dimension to this inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry was perceived as the best approach for this research for several reasons. The first consideration was the marginalized nature of this population and the desire to have their voices heard. Secondly, discussions of narrative research (Josselson, 2011) emphasized the meaning making from a collaboration of the participants and the researcher. Finally, the variety of literature strains suggested an interdisciplinary approach to the research. Susan Chase (2008) identifies the unique aspects of narrative inquiry as follows: “Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (p.58)”. Ruthellen Josselson (2011) expands upon Chase’s description by pointing to the linkages in meaning made by participant and researcher. She further states the importance of that which is both stated and unstated by participants in creating sense of their life stories.

This study considers theoretical materials from multiple disciplines and strives over all to hear the voices of a population which has been largely ignored. The data generated by the questionnaire was informative but the comments about the feelings which arose from seeing Queer portrayals on screen are impactful.

While discussing interviewing as a tool of narrative inquiry Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer (2002) in “Queering the Interview”, identify the issue of voice in the use of the transcriptions of information gained through the interview process. The researcher’s

ethical response to the gleaning of information and its retelling as a written document are also important aspects of narrative inquiry. The political impetus of narrative inquiry is social justice attempting an anti-colonial approach to the interviewee.

Narrative inquiry which has ties to the philosophy of John Dewey (1916) is used here not only due to its interdisciplinary approach but also due to its humanism (Clandini and Connelly, 2000). The consideration of narrative inquiry is the individual with his/her story, in a specific time, place, and context. This study questions the context of film as a means of perpetuating the binary hegemony of sexuality. While the means of doing so are the stories individuals tell in response to questions about their experiences as non-heterosexual people in viewing mainstream Hollywood film.

Setting of the Study

The primary setting for this study is the Greater Sacramento area. However, only members of the sexual minority were invited to participate. Questionnaires were completed wherever the respondents felt appropriate and later returned to the researcher. Dialogues were held either in the home of the respondent or in another location, where quiet conversation was possible. One of the respondents began the dialogue one day and then completed her thoughts via email the next day.

Entry into the community

I returned to college specifically to write a thesis having to do with the issue of internalized homophobia. I wanted to write on this subject because of the devastating effect homophobia in general, and internalized homophobia in particular, has on my community. I perceive this thesis as a contribution to the literature on homophobia, being

my way of giving back to my Queer family. Once the questionnaire was drafted I had no doubts that my Queer community would want to contribute. As a member of the community I had no need for a portal into the community. However, I did desire a larger sample for my research than just the people I knew personally. This was accomplished by doing additional outreach. The three primary means of outreach were: asking friends and classmates to pass along copies of the questionnaire to their Queer friends and relatives; contacting the on campus Gay and Lesbian Alliance at Sacramento State College and requesting participants; and, soliciting respondents at the Sacramento Gay and Lesbian Center.

As a Lesbian, it may have been easier for me to obtain the number of well-considered and in-depth responses that the questionnaire generated. Being a member of the community may have enabled me to obtain more trust from the participants. I believe I was perceived by the community as being empathetic to their oppression, as it is also my own; and as an insider the quality of my data may have improved. Kong, et al., (2002) identify the importance of empathy in conducting interviews, which by extension could include questionnaires and surveys in obtaining ethical qualitative data. They also discuss the importance of a Queer identity while interviewing members of the sexual minority community.

Invitation to Participate

The population which is of concern to this study is youth between the ages of 15 and 24 who believe or are questioning their sexual identity as not being heterosexual; however, the population actually sampled is adults who identify as Queer. The reason for

using adults rather than youth occurred for several reasons: first, there are ethical reasons for not influencing youth either positively or negatively who are questioning their sexual orientation. In addition, questioning or struggling youth are not readily accessible for interviewing. Finally, finding a sample large enough to interview would be exceedingly difficult. Using a questionnaire, an adult sample was asked to reflect on the messages they received from Hollywood film during the period of their coming out. The questionnaire was distributed to people whom identity as not heterosexual and live primarily in the Sacramento area.

An attempt was also made to find respondents who came of age both before and after the Stonewall rebellion of 1969, which marks the beginning of the modern gay civil rights era. Youth who came of age after Stonewall faced less oppression than those who came of age before; in addition, mainstream Hollywood's depiction of Queers in film was particularly negative during the period of the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to this age diversity, it was desirable to have respondents from across the gender and race/ethnicity spectrums. In the past, it has been customary to identify the white gay man as the representative of all Queer people. Lesbians, Bisexuals, transgendered people and people of color have found this problematic because the experiences of the privileged white gay male are different from those of the less privileged non-white and or non-male. Participants were invited to complete a questionnaire with these issues of diversity in mind.

Description of the Participants

A summary of the responses shows of the thirty-five questionnaires distributed 27 were returned all containing usable data. Of these, the age range is from 19 to 71, there were 15 females and 12 males, the racial breakdown shows 13 white, five Latinos/Chicanos, two African Americans, two Asian, one Mid-Easterner and four who identified as multiracial or mixed. The respondents identified their sexual orientation primarily as Bisexual, Lesbian or Gay with one older male answering Homosexual. The youngest age at which a respondent questioned his/her sexual orientation was “3 or 4” while the eldest was 28. The greatest time span between coming out to oneself and coming out to another was 22 years while two of the respondents came out to themselves and to another during the same year.

Additionally, five participants were invited to dialogue with the researcher about how they perceived film influencing their Queer identity development. Three of the five were able to participate in this form of dialogue, which is discussed in more detail below.

Review of Research Questions

For the purpose of this study the research questions listed in Chapter 1 were used in analyzing the data received from the participants' questionnaires. The research questions identified in Chapter One are as follows:

- 1- How do Queer youth develop their Queer identity?
- 2- Do mainstream Hollywood films influence the identity development of Queer youth?
- 3- Could the high rate of Queer youth suicide be related to the negative Queer images seen in mainstream Hollywood films?

4- Is there a relationship between imitative suicide and film?

5- Since the Stonewall Rebellion, have mainstream Hollywood films presented more positive Queer images?

Several of the participants, through their questionnaire answers, shared poignant stories of alienation or intriguing insights into the effect film had on their coming out process. This rich data lead the researcher to request additional dialogue. There were 14 respondents who gave permission for additional contact; of these five were selected three men and two women. These individuals were chosen because of their interest in film, or the questions or because they mentioned having struggled with their coming out process. Of the five participants contacted, three agreed to a follow up dialogue. Unfortunately, the two respondents in their twenties were unavailable to participate. Therefore, the youngest member of the dialogue was 39. This individual was born in 1971, two years after the Stonewall rebellion. Having a dialogue with someone in their twenties would have provided different insights into how film is viewed by younger Queer people.

These conversations occurred beginning the week of July 11, 20011, and either took place at the individual's home or in a public coffee shop or restaurant. The dialogues were open-ended often beginning with a question asking for clarification or elaboration of a particular comment made by the participant on the questionnaire. All of these additional dialogues were tape recorded and transcribed. Information from these dialogues is also included as part of the data discussed in Chapter 4. An abridged transcript of these conversations can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection

The primary source of data for this study was the questionnaire tool which was distributed to 35 people in the greater Sacramento area; of these an exceptionally high 77% were returned providing 27 usable questionnaires. Following analysis of the questionnaires an additional five people were contacted and asked to dialogue about some of their questionnaire responses and a possible impact film may have had on their coming out process. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Once the questionnaire was drafted and approved by the Sacramento State's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, the researcher began identifying potential participants. Copies of the Human Subject Consent form and the questionnaire were distributed to a circle of friends with request for completion and references to their friends who might be interested in contributing as well. In addition, contact was made with the Pride Center, which is the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender student association on campus. Later, while seeking older participants, the researcher spent time discussing the topic and questionnaire with community members of the Sacramento Gay and Lesbian Center.

Research Design

Questionnaire Design

The intent of the questionnaire was to hear the voices of a population that is largely ignored by research, which is the voice of young Queer people (Boyd, 2008). Due to concerns of finding a large enough sample, the questionnaire was given to adults who identified as not heterosexual. Since this is a qualitative study based on personal narrative

and using Queer theory the reflections of the participants are of primary importance. Consequently, the questionnaire requested some demographic material but was most concerned with what Hollywood film had been seen by participants after realizing they might not be members of the dominant sexual orientation and what responses they had to those early film experiences. Because the majority of American films featuring a Queer character have that character's death occur by the end of the film a question was included asking if the first Queer character seen had ended up dead and if the viewer had drawn any conclusions from that. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix A.

The construction of the questionnaire considered only four demographic items of importance to this study, they are, age now, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. These items were selected to strive for diversity in the sample. Following the demographic items ten questions were asked of the participants attempting to identify where and when they came out and when and what their first Queer character film was. These questions reflect the assumption of the researcher that a negative portrayal of Queer people in films may be one factor affecting the individual's coming out process.

Other factors considered to be germane were size of geographic area at the time of coming out. This item is based on the assumption that a larger city provides more possible Queer role models that lessens the effect of a negative experience at the movies. The questions concerning age at which a participant came out to his/her self and age at which he/she came out to another were asked to judge the difficulty of the coming out process. Here the assumption is that the shorter the time between coming out to self and coming out to another the less the challenge of accepting the Queer identity.

The questionnaire reflects data gathering using narrative inquiry. Specifically, it asked the respondent to reflect on the first film seen containing a Queer character and what feeling the portrayal of that character generated for him/her. The intent of the questions is to produce contextual stories from a developmental period in the participants' coming out process.

Dialogue Design

In an attempt to understand the importance of film to the dialogue partner, the first question asked was, "How do you feel film/movies contribute to how you make meaning out of life"? The second question was in some cases a continuation from the first or was specific to a comment the individual had made on the questionnaire. The final question was, "We have discussed many ideas about film and Queer portrayal today, is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude"?

Data Analysis

Data was collected from the questionnaires and analyzed for demographic information but more importantly for reflections on early film viewing. To assist in the analysis of the comments on film the data was read and scrutinized for themes; specifically, themes which related to the original research questions. An Excel spreadsheet was used to identify like demographics patterns using a variety of sorts. Information as to early influences of film was transcribed and is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. A copy of the spreadsheet can be found in Appendix B as well as a copy of all comments made on the questionnaires by the respondents.

Limitations

This study used participants primarily from the Greater Sacramento area. A similar study conducted in another region of the country would produce different results. Several of the respondents completed their questionnaires within close proximity of each other and may have inadvertently influenced each other in the selection of films discussed. Finally, as discussed by Fontana and Frey (2008) research, particularly qualitative research, tends to carry the imprint of the researcher in the questions asked and the answers reported. If I were to write the questionnaire/questionnaire today I would exclude the question asking for the respondents' geographical location at the time he/she came out. In addition, I would provide a definition of what is meant by "mainstream Hollywood film".

Protection of Human Subjects

Following the dictates of California State University, Sacramento approval from the committee for the protection of Human Subjects was obtained and followed to protect the rights of the individuals used in the study. Copies of the two consent forms used, one for the questionnaire and one for the individual dialogues, are included in Appendix A. Each participant completed at least one consent form with those interviewed completing two. In the study, no individuals are identified by name and the data uses a numerical code to protect the participants' anonymity. Finally, as required by the committee, the data was read and handled by the researcher only and kept in a lock box until appropriate shredding can take place.

Profile of the Researcher

As previously stated in this section, I am an older Lesbian returning to college with the specific intent of writing a thesis that contributes to the knowledge on homophobia and particularly internalized homophobia. In the introduction I shared my story of the impact seeing the film *The Children's Hour* had on my own coming out; specifically it retarded my process for over ten years. Although I was born in Los Angeles California, Indio California is the place I consider as my home town during the early years of my Queer journey. In the late 1950s, it was a small, hot dusty, conservative and provincial spot in Riverside County. (This is similar to what can be said of it today.) I feel that the locale, Indio, and the film, *The Children's Hour*, worked together to terrorize me regarding my lesbian identity. Writing this thesis can be seen as another step in healing from and reducing my own internalized homophobia. I found it affirming that participants from my generation had similar reactions to film from that period; and I found it heartening that those born after the Stonewall rebellion reported fewer traumas from the films they saw.

Organization of Chapters 4 and 5

Chapter 4 uses the information derived from the questionnaires and the dialogues for analysis. In addition, the themes derived from the interviews and questionnaires are discussed while mindful of the original research questions. Demographic evaluation along with thematic interpretation with reflection on the literature comprises the content of Chapter 4; while analysis of the narrative with reference to the original research questions comprises Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

As Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008) state, when reviewing the ways of analyzing qualitative narrative data, several approaches attempt to ensure the veracity of the information received. Robert Stake (2003) discusses triangulation as a means of clarifying and verifying that data gathered is reliable. While triangulation is a multi-approach method of data capture, it is Richardson's (2008) metaphor of the crystallization, which will be used here. The metaphor of a crystal, taking in light that is refracted back in a rainbow of color best describes the analysis in this study. Using the information derived from the questionnaires and the interviews and then reflecting that data through the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provides an interesting narrative of the effect of mainstream Hollywood film on queer youth.

Thematic interpretation in relationship to the literature that forms the basis of this research composes the content of this chapter, along with the in-depth review of the participants' demographic information. The demographic analysis begins this chapter because it frames the themes and influences that narrative analysis. A thematic analysis follows the participant's demographic exploration and includes some of the demographic information.

Participant Demographics

The participant demographics are derived from the material found in the respondents questionnaires. In addition to reporting, the raw data derived from the

questionnaires ranges and percentages are also given where appropriate. In some cases, the rationale for asking a question is included with the responses. Finally, where appropriate analysis is included to explain why a particular piece of data is important. A total of 35 questionnaires were distributed with 27 or 77% returned all of which contained some degree of usable data. The demographic data is derived from ten items on the questionnaire and is reviewed below in three categories: Age, Gender and Race/Ethnicity, Coming-out Factors, and Film Overview.

Age, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Race/Ethnicity

Age

The participants' age range is from 19 to 71, with a mean of 26 and an average of 40.2. The age of the respondents is significant because, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the modern Gay Rights movement is considered to have begun with the Stonewall rebellion in 1969. This year reflects the beginning of change in the lives of Queer people. It is important to remember, as discussed in chapter 2 above, that being homosexual was considered a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1972. Beginning in 1972 most members of the mental health profession changed their perception from Queer people being mentally ill to the concept that the intolerance of society might be the mental health issue. Consequently, during the years following the Stonewall rebellion the American society became more tolerant of Queer people making it easier to embrace this non-dominant identity.

Therefore, the political climate into which one is born was affected by the Gay Civil Rights movement, and in turn affected how society treated the Queer individual.

Thus, the 16 (59%) respondents who were born after Stonewall had different experiences than those born before. This age variance is revealed in the movies identified, and more importantly, the degree of negative images alluded to in the films seen. Those born before Stonewall saw Queer portrayal on the screen in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s when portrayals of Queer folks were most toxic. The toxic elements were identified in the film section of chapter two where it was revealed that close to 80% of the Queer characters seen in film from 1962 to 1978 ended up dead (Russo, 1987). While the age diversity of the participants may have been the most compelling factor in the responses received, the gender of the respondents also demonstrated variance in films viewed.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

There were 15 female and 12 male participants, who identified their sexual orientation primarily as Bisexual, Lesbian or Gay with one older male answering Homosexual and one younger female identifying as Queer. Four of the women identified as Bisexual or Bisexual/Lesbian while none of the men used the term Bisexual in their self-identification. This result was not anticipated and could be attributed to several factors outside the parameters of this research. Two speculations arose based on this fact: first, male respondents, having male privilege feel no need to identify as other than a Gay male, while women look for additional social approval add the bisexual that connects them to the privileged male; or, this is a simple anomaly in the data.

Past studies have focused on Gay men while ignoring Queer women in the belief that the male experience is universal. Consequently, a gender balance was strived for in the distribution of questionnaires. The non-universality of the Gay male experience is

shown in the responses. The data collected indicates that Queer men and women do not watch the same film nor do they react to what they see in the same way. These factors will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of themes below. While past studies have used Gay male respondents to speak for all Queer people it should be noted that the Gay males in these studies usually identified as white.

Race/Ethnicity

The respondents identified their race or ethnicity in a variety of ways, with white or Caucasian being dominant with 13 (48%). The remaining 52% identified from a number of other groups, Latinos, Multiracial, African American, and others. There are five (19%) who are grouped together as Latinos, and who self-identified as one of the following: Chicana, Latino, Hispanic or Mexican American. The next category identified as multiracial or mixed with four (15%) respondents. The final respondents identified as African American with two (7%), and one each (4%) for Asian, Cambodian, and Middle Eastern. As mentioned above past studies of Queer people focused on males, particularly white males in the belief that white males can speak for all Queer people. In the hopes of obtaining richer, more meaningful data, conscious effort was made to be as inclusive as possible in finding questionnaire respondents.

Coming-out Factors

The youngest age at which a respondent questioned his/her sexual orientation was “3 or 4” while the eldest was 28. The greatest time span between coming-out to oneself and coming-out to another was 22 years while two of the respondents came out to themselves and to another during the same year. The assumption is, the greater the span

of time between the two coming-out events, (thinking one might not be heterosexual and telling someone else that you were not heterosexual) the greater the struggle of the individual in accepting his/her Queer identity. The correlation being, the greater the struggle to accept oneself as Queer the greater the likelihood of internalized homophobia, isolation, and possibly suicidal idealization.

The average span for the group as a whole was six and a half years between self-awareness and acknowledgement of sexuality to another. Here again, a division can be seen between those who came of age before the Stonewall rebellion and those who came out after. The individual with the longest length of time between the two coming out events was born prior to the Stonewall rebellion while the two individuals with the shortest length of time were born after. For those born prior to the Stonewall rebellion the average time between coming out to oneself and to another was nine and a third years. For those born after Stonewall the number reduces to four and a half years on average. However, an average of four and a half years in their coming-out indicates parity has not been reached for Queer people. This lack of parity is seen in the treatment of Queer characters in film, as well as in society, for example, the fact that in only eight states in the United States is it possible for a Queer couple to marry and the benefits of that marriage are not forthcoming from the Federal Government. It is not surprising that Queers are treated as second-class citizens by Hollywood when that is also the treatment they receive from their government.

The question regarding the size of the city in which the participant lived at the time of his/her coming-out was asked due to a belief that a smaller community would

have fewer role models for a Queer youth than larger city. This question was the one most often ignored by the respondents, with six people (16%) not stating. Speculations as to why this occurred include the difficulty for the respondents in remembering or the absence of understanding as to why the question was being asked. The responses that were given showed great disparity in size of community.

Three people gave the actual name of the city, which has been changed to reflect the population size to protect their anonymity. The range in size was from a population of eight to a city of over two million. Of the 21 respondents five (24%) lived in a town of less than 1,000, while, nine (43%) lived in population areas from 2,000 to 99,999, and five (24%) living in a city of 100,000 or more. This final group includes one participant who responded that she had lived in a “large city”.

The question regarding size of community was based on the hypothesis that those who came from the smaller areas would have fewer role models and greater time spans in their coming-out. However, the data does not support this conclusion. Although this lack of support for the hypothesis could be blamed on the missing data, the probability is that the hypothesis was false. Analysis of the existing data shows no correlation between town size and length of time between the two coming-out events. While the geographical consideration appeared unimportant to the participants, most appeared interested in identifying film that had influenced them.

Film Overview

Forty films were mentioned by the respondents with *Desert Hearts* (1985) having the most citations with four. The earliest year mentioned in which a film containing a

Queer character was seen was 1959 with two films being cited, *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) and *Some like It Hot* (1959). The most recent response to this question was with one respondent who in 2010 saw *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1995). Additional analysis of the film component follows below. In addition, a complete listing of the films mentioned by respondents, along with the spreadsheet providing respondents' complete questionnaire answers can be found in Appendix B.

Major Themes and Patterns

The major themes and patterns which are discussed in this section are derived from the participants' answers to the questions posed on the questionnaire (copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A) particularly questions five, eight, and the space for additional comments. Question 5 asks participants to reflect on any feeling that may have arisen after their first viewing of a film containing a Queer character. Question 8, in conjunction with questions 6 and 7, asks participants if the Queer character in the film was still alive at the end of the film and what conclusions, if any, they made of that. The section for additional comments allows respondents to cover any thoughts about the topic that were not specifically addressed in prior questions. In addition to the information derived from the questionnaire a few participants were interviewed for more in-depth discussion of the influence of film on their lives as Queer people.

In analyzing the respondents' answers, two primary strains developed. The first experience with a film containing a Queer character is considered either a positive or a negative experience. Positive or negative is used here to relate to the feelings the Queer character in the film brought up for the respondent. In this context, the Queer character

in the film is understood to be a role model for the Queer audience member. Then the experience for the respondent would be negative if he or she felt embarrassed viewing the actions of the Queer character in the film. Similarly, feelings of happiness from viewing the Queer person in the film would be positive.

Ten of the participants reported primarily negative emotions in relation to the first film with a Queer character and 10 reported a mainly positive response with three individuals having both negative and positive reactions, while four gave answer of no emotion. The emotional responses fall into four general themes identified as: Queers end up dead; the Queer portrayal is not me; Empathy for the Queer character; and, It is ok to be Queer. Each theme is discussed in detail below including the responses from the participants and the relevance of the information to Queer identity development. The first two themes are seen as negative reactions while the third may be either positive or negative and the final item is positive. In addition to the emotions viewing the film raised in the participants, consideration is also given to the films themselves. This is due to the various items which can influence how a film is received. For example, the time period in which it was made, the genre, the characters and the plot; but most of all for the purpose of this study was the Queer character still alive at the closing of the film.

Some of the films that were named by more than one participant are also analyzed for Queer influence. Although the questionnaire asked for a “mainstream film” no definition was given and several of the films identified were not mainstream having been independently made. In addition, several participants identified films that could be labeled Queer films, that is, they were made specifically for a Lesbian or Gay audience.

Additionally, one participant identified a French Queer film as being influential to his life as a Queer person and several more participants identified film made in either Canada or Great Brittan. Finally, when discussing film the type or genre of the film will influence the reaction. The spreadsheet listing the films can be found in Appendix B. This spreadsheet includes: the genres of the films along with the title, year of release, director, and distributing studio with country of origin, and how many participants mentioned it. This spreadsheet shows that 15 of the films are considered dramas, six were comedies, and 18 are mixtures containing elements of drama, comedy, and/or romance, and one is a horror film. This classification system and the demographic material on the films was developed using information from IMDb-The Internet Movie Database (n.d.).

Finally, of the 27 respondents, three stated that the film they viewed had no effect on them. The literature on the pedagogical implications of film suggests that these respondents were affected by film but at a sub-conscious level. It is also possible that as Queer people they rejected the images seen to a level of denying the power of those images. The remaining 24 respondents, shared clear and in some cases distressing memories of the images they had seen in mainstream Hollywood film and more importantly what meaning they had taken from them.

Themes from Participants' Responses

Queers end up dead

In conjunction with naming the first film seen containing a Queer character, the sixth question on the questionnaire asks, "Was this queer character still alive at the film's end"? The intent being to draw parallels between imitative suicides and dead Queer role

models viewed in film. Seven participants remembered the Queer character as having died before the end of the film. Two stated that they did not remember drawing any conclusion from the death of the Queer character; two felt they drew no conclusion, while three of the seven shared the meaning drawn from these deaths. These three people identified the possibility that the end of the Queer person in the film could relate to their own possible demise. The researcher anticipated these respondents being from the pre-Stonewall generation.

Two of the respondents from the pre-Stonewall generation were discussing the more blatantly homophobic, toxic, films of the 1960s, but the third is only 19. He saw *Philadelphia* (1993) in 2005 when he was 13, and he had begun questioning his sexuality at the age of 12. His youth makes his identification with the character particularly poignant when he says, “This is the first time I saw a queer character. I was sad that he was dying. I also felt afraid if I was gay that I would [die too]”. His conclusion at the end of the film was “I thought all gay people would die”. As discussed above, the film *Philadelphia* (1993) is a sympathetic depiction of a gay man dying of Aids. Yet, the lesson taken from the film was that if he were Queer he too would die.

One of the older female participants stated in response to the death of the Queer character in the film *The Fox* (1967), “If you go outside convention, there is something wrong with you; and you can come to a bad end/ it is not safe”. The film *The Fox* (1967) is based on the work by D. H Lawrence and ends in heavy symbolism with the death of one of the lesbian characters when a tree “accidentally” falls on her. The tree falls between her legs and was cut down by the male interloper to her lesbian relationship, (the fox of

the title), he then returns the other lesbian to the hegemonic sexual role for women. It may be completely coincidental that this participant when discussing her sexuality perceives herself to be 90% lesbian and 10% bisexual; or it could be possible result of seeing what happened to the character in the film. While reflecting on the viewing of the film she states, “Two women-one neurotic (Sandy Dennis), other (brunette actress) [Anne Haywood] seemed heterosexual. Sandy Dennis- slightly repellant; other actress-attractive. Didn’t relate to Sandy Dennis character; liked the other female character”. It is the bisexual character who the respondent finds attractive and who ends up alive and “safe”; while she sees the lesbian character as “slightly repellant”.

This participant saw *The Fox* (1967) when she was approximately 20 years old. However, it was another three years before she first questioned her sexual orientation and then an additional eight years before her coming-out to another person. The message that she acquired from the film was that going outside convention is unsafe. And finally, the character in the film with whom she most identified was the woman who ends up safe as a bisexual. One can only question if her coming out would have been easier had she not seen and at some level identified with the characters in *The Fox* (1967).

The final response to this theme was simply, the lesson learned from seeing *The Children’s Hour* (1962) was “The only way out of some serious situations is suicide”. He went on to state that was a lesson he took to heart and had several attempted suicides due to his challenges with his Queer identity. According to his memory of this film and his life during the early 1960s, he perceives a lesson learned from the film, death as means of responding to societal pressure to conform. In his additional comments he discussed his

first suicide attempts as follows, “I came out in High School and broke up with my first lover at age 17. I was hospitalized for suicide attempt that year. I tried again twice”. The year he is referring to is 1965, which also is the year he gave as having seen *The Children’s Hour* (1962). This response obviously reflects concerns about the possibility of imitative suicide and film. This person states that the message he gained from the film was that suicide is an appropriate solution to the struggle of being Queer. While it is impossible to blame just the film for his suicides attempts, clearly, in his mind, there is a connection.

In a follow-up conversation with this individual, I asked what it was about the film that affected him so strongly. He stated, “It is the shame she feels at being Queer. Then, after that big confession, she just goes off and hangs herself. How could you not be affected by seeing that when you’re a kid”?

Viewing this film *The Children’s Hour* (1962) now, it is difficult to understand the impact it would have on a young questioning youth. Now, it seems over acted, heavy handed and more than a little silly in its binary approach to sexuality. For a viewer curious about the film’s reception at the time of its release a viewing of Jane Anderson’s segment of *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000) will give a historical context to the time and climate for the film and the Queers viewing it.

Queer portrayal is not me

As discussed in Chapter 2 above, in the section on identity development all youth use role models to assist in their identity development. The responses in this section and the following section entitled “it is ok to be Queer”, specifically address the influence

Queer screen images had on participants. Their statements' made primarily in response to question five, (Please describe any feeling that the queer character [in the film] brought up for you) reflect how the Queer film images influenced their identity development.

Here again there is a difference in the presence or absence of negativity in the answers and the participants' coming of age before or after Stonewall. The problem finding positive role models for Queer youth in film and elsewhere was particularly difficult prior to the Stonewall rebellion. The Production Code prohibited any reference to homosexuality in film, there were laws that prohibited being a practicing homosexual, and it was a time when a Queer person was very careful to be closeted. Being closeted was necessary, as one respondent pointed out, "I did know that I did not want to be like these characters [seen in film during the 1960s] and be on the receiving end of being shunned, disliked, or hated".

It was this theme asking how the Queer character fit with the viewers' perception of self, which drew the largest number on comments. Many participants struggled with the Queer stereotypes seen in various films. Their struggles revolved around questioning what that stereotype said about them if they were Queer. While discussing the pedagogical implications of cinema it was stated that although film is a construction many in the audience perceive it as reality. While considering the effect of film on the sophisticated viewer bell hooks (1996) states:

The fact that some folks may attend films as 'resisting spectators' does not really change the reality that most of us, no matter how sophisticated our strategies of critique and intervention, are usually seduced, at last of a time, by the images we

see on the screen. They have power over us and we have no power over them.

(p.3)

The power that hooks is referring to in this passage is the power over the adult, which raises the question what is the power over a less mature individual? This question resonates in some of the responses that arose for the participants when viewing their first Queer character in a film.

The concern as to what the image seen meant about the viewer was raised by participants regardless of their having come out before or after Stonewall. For example, one 26-year-old male discussing *The Birdcage* (1996) said, “It made me very uncomfortable, though hilarious, made me “afraid” to be gay because of the sheer flamboyancy of the characters and yet they had to play straight to be accepted”. The film he is referring to is an American remake of the French comedy *La Cage Aux Folles* (1978). The plots of both films revolve around the wedding of son of the two Gay men marrying the daughter of a conservative politician and the need for the father to hide who they are for the son’s happiness. For Queer audiences while the film is funny there is the discomfort of returning to the closet to be accepted.

The same respondent further clarify what this film meant to him as he says, “My fear of my own sexuality was never so much from death or potentially dying, it was the often over-feminizing gay characters-it always made me very uncomfortable”. His struggle is with the stereotype of the Gay male that has been a part of cinema since its inception. His concern can be summed up as, I am attracted to men but I don’t want to be a woman or act like a woman; yet, that is all that I see as a role model in film. How to

find the middle ground of living as oneself which for him did not include being effeminate.

While an older man reflecting on *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) stated, “I think the older character died, younger didn’t, but both characters made me think gay life – style should be avoided at all costs”! What is particularly thought provoking in his response is his conclusion that what he saw in film had no connection to his life? At one point, further on in his questionnaire he states, “It looks like I was full of self-loathing, but since I didn’t identify AT ALL with gay characters, I was very happy and contented being the non-gay gay boy” [emphasis in the original]. This is an interesting reflection especially when we consider that role models are essential to our maturity. What was a “non-gay gay boy” and how did he determine that was who he was without having any reference points?

The full response from a third male considers the pedagogical implications of film as he states while commenting on *Boys in the Band* (1970):

To me, the characters were sad, depressing, bitchy, mean, bored, angry- This is not who I am, nor is it who I want to become. I’ll find my own way. [Then later I saw] *Torch Song Trilogy* (1988) -in the 80’s, I think—no positive role models, as I recall-Nope, don’t want to be like them either.

Looking at the demographic information for this participant we can see that he had already found his “own way” since he came out to himself and another prior to seeing either of these films. Since he grew up in a small community outside California, it would be interesting to know where he did find his role models.

As an older woman stated upon seeing Queer images from the 1960s:

I do have a strong feeling that all the movies I saw when I was young portrayed homosexuals in a negative light. Men were effeminate “fairies”; and women were mannish ‘bulldykes’, although I didn’t know those terms. I did know that I did not want to be like these characters and be on the receiving end of being shunned, disliked, or hated.

When considering the possible effect film might have on the coming out process of young people it is relevant to point out that this woman began questioning her sexuality in 1973 when she was 23 years old but resisted coming-out to another person until she was 31. The homophobia she identified in the film she saw was not restricted to film but was prevalent in society as a whole. However, it was film that gave the visual presentation of coming-out equating to being “shunned, disliked, or hated”. In addition, it would have been these images which made repressing any Queer feeling appear as a better choice than coming-out.

Part of the maturation process has to do with finding role models to emulate in one’s identity development. This was particularly difficult for those born prior to the Stonewall rebellion when it came to the Queer characters viewed in film. As one older participant stated:

In both movies, [*Some Like it Hot* (1959) and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)] I could not identify with any of the characters-they were all from a different planet. If anything, they made me wonder what I was because I wasn’t like any of them.

Another young male identified how the Queer male images seen in film contributed to his identity development:

I knew I was struggling with my sexuality but it scared me to death that I would end up acting like, and dressing up like women. I never understood as a kid why gay automatically had to mean girly, effeminate, and sissy. Though some are, not all are or have to be.

In the questionnaire, he states that he first questioned his sexuality at the age of 14, and spent three years attempting to rectify the stereotypes he found in the cinema with who he felt he was as a young Gay man. The comedy he saw, *The Birdcage* (1996), instead of providing him with positive role models to emulate contributed his fear of what it meant to be Queer. However, not all respondents felt a connection to a possible Queer identity; some reported feeling empathy and compassion for the images they viewed but did not relate those emotions to their own identity.

Empathy for the Queer Character

The responses of some of the participants reflected a disassociation from the Queer character. For example, one 20 year old in reaction to seeing *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1995) stated, “I really loved Tim Curry’s character. Though it saddened me when he died”. Not only his words but the use of the passive voice shows a distancing of himself from the dead Queer character on the screen. Yet, one of the pleasures an audience gets from film is the identifying with the hero.

On the other hand, an older female who had viewed *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) in the early 1970s found it to be, “Tragic, Tennessee Williams is very intense.

Sadness for the isolation.” However, she does not connect it to her life as a future lesbian. This participant did not come out until 1981 at least ten years after the viewing and identifying of the intensity and isolation of the film. She was one of the participants who felt film had not been a significant contributor to her identity development.

A final participant, who on viewing *Boys on the Side* (1995), felt sadness for the Queer character’s predicament in the film. She related this to her own situation as a young lesbian as she states, “I felt sad for her (the character’s) situation. I completely related to loving or liking someone that you could not have because I felt I couldn’t be me and be with another woman”. When her comment was revisited during a dialogue she stated:

The thing about Queer characters in Hollywood film is they don’t get the traditional Hollywood ending. That is they don’t live happily ever after. I want that for my life. Hollywood films have promised me that ending but I never see it with Queer characters. In *Boys on the Side* the Lesbian, character is a positive role model but she doesn’t get what she wants. She is left pining for the other woman.

The indication is that if you are a Lesbian then you can’t have the traditional ending”.

This may again be an indication of the pedagogical implications of film; viewing and identifying with the unrequited love of the lesbian character; while also suggesting the internalization of the societal message that loving another woman would not provide the happiness she was seeking. However, not all the messages taken from the cinema are negative. Many of the respondents, particularly the younger ones, found positive role

models and happy possibilities at the movies. The lesson learned from these role models was that it was ok to be themselves.

It is ok to be Queer

For the most part the finding of a positive role model in film happened for Queer people who were born after the Stonewall rebellion. Examples of finding a positive role model come from several participants. For example, one woman stated that seeing *Desert Hearts* (1985) and *Personal Best* (1982) provided “Hope. The queer characters offered hope. I felt like I wasn’t alone”. While a young male related viewing *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1995) to his Queer identity. He states, “Seeing the queer character gave me a sense of normalcy in how I act as well as giving me reinforcement in being different”. He had begun questioning his sexuality when he was seven and stated that he saw this film around the age of nine, and although he felt supported in his Queer identity it was another nine years before he came out to another person.

Two additional examples, which speak to the importance of role models in film, are quoted here. A third participant stated, “The characters empowered me because they were in touch with their sexuality”. While, the oldest participant indicated: “Seeing any film with gays (especially in positive roles) tended to be affirming”. Again, these responses relate to the Queer identity models, which identified the problem of isolation in a Queer youth and discuss the importance of role models.

Patterns identified in Cited Films

The idea that film teaches us how to be in the world has been supported by many authorities reviewed in Chapter 2. The current section includes three main cinematic

patterns, which emerged from the data. First, personal reaction, the example discussed, *Boys in the Band* (1970) generated opposing responses from two of the participants. Next, the effect of genre is considered using at older drama verses newer comedy through responses to *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar* (1995). Finally, the rise of the Queer film is considered. Although the questionnaire asked for mainstream Hollywood films, the term mainstream was never defined and at least 12 non-mainstreams films are part of the data. Specifically, the participants named ten Queer films. In fact, the film most often named in the questionnaire, *Desert Hearts* (1985) is based on an iconic lesbian novel and was made as an independent film. A brief review of Queer films is the final pattern discussed in this section.

Personal reaction to film

The respondents to the questionnaire named 40 films that had influence in their lives as Queer people. However, reactions to the same film by different respondents were not always consistent. The film *Boys in the Band* (1970) generated contrasting responses from two of the participants. Both are males who identify as gay, both were born before the Stonewall rebellion, both suspected a Queer identity while in their teens but waited over seven years to come out to another person, and both remember seeing the film in the early 1970s. More importantly, both saw the Queer characters in the film as possible role models. Yet, as discussed above, one perceived the characters negatively and said, “This is not who I am, nor is it who I want to become. I’ll find my own way” while the other respondent had an opposite reaction. He stated he felt: “Excitement, knowing that I was

not alone with my gayness”. These responses reflect the importance of finding oneself in film. While one rejected the role models seen in, *Boys in the Band* (1970), the other found comfort in not being alone in his Queer identity. As Russo (1987) has pointed out during the 1970s, Queer people would knowingly go to see a film with a negative Queer character just to see their own reality replicated.

Effect of genre on participant reaction to film

As role models, the characters portrayed in *Boys in the Band* (1970) may well have been “sad, depressing, bitchy, mean, bored, angry” as characterized by the respondent above but at least at the end of the film they were all still alive. That fact makes *Boys in the Band* (1970) an exception for its time. As discussed in Chapter 2 above, the vast majority of films during the 1960s and 1970s killed off the Queer character before the final reel. This was especially true of dramas.

Suddenly, Last Summer (1959), the earliest film mentioned by participants as being influential was a drama which climaxes with the death of the Queer character. As one respondent vividly remembered: “They tore him apart...”; while the another found the film- “Tragic”. A third respondent during a dialogue remembered seeing the film on television while his parents were away at work. He stated:

I didn’t know exactly what was going on, I was pretty young at the time maybe early teens; but I do remember the ending and how horrified I was—they just cannibalized him. Yuck! I’ve seen it [*Suddenly, Last Summer*] several times since and I still can’t stand the ending. There is something else going on in that film, a

feeling of manipulation. What I took from it was to be Gay was not only dangerous but also in some way shady or unscrupulous.

These images and the feelings derived from them must influence the self-image of the viewer who identifies with the Queer character. To reprise a quote from Allport (1954) on internalizing the messages of society, including film, “One’s reputation, whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered, into one’s head without doing something to one’s character” (p. 142). It is from films like *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) that Queer viewers absorbed the homophobic lessons that are being so aptly depicted on the screen.

What is particularly ironic in regards to this film is that the character, Sebastian is never verbally identified as Queer in the film. The film was made during the years of Code enforcement and any reference to homosexuality was expressly forbidden yet, three of our respondents read the character as Queer. Two reflected on the lessons they received from the film as “Sadness for the isolation” and the warning, “Do not force yourself on Heterosexuals”. The film is an ugly suggestion of what it means to be Queer with all the homophobia implications imbedded within it. It is not surprising that at least one of the participants still has trouble watching the ending. *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) is clearly a drama while films identified by younger respondents tend to be comedies.

Two respondents, one gay and one lesbian, both in their 20s, identified the comedy *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar* (1995) as the first film they saw containing a Queer character. The plot of *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie*

Newmar (1995) revolves around the adventure of three drag queens traveling across country from New York to Hollywood to attend a drag queen pageant. The film is the Hollywood campy remake of the more serious Australian film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). Both films consider the idea that it is easier to be Queer in a major city rather than the providences and both appear to display the need for tolerance. The self-identified gay male stated, “To see men so in touch with everything that is empowering about being gay (being different, unique, stylish and fabulous) always gave me the courage to be myself”. While the lesbian indicated her feeling about the film as, “I was happy to see queer characters be vulnerable and accepted”. By extension, the film being a comedy allowed her to feel happy and accepted in her own Queer identity. Yet, another example of positive role models helping Queer people feel good about themselves. As discussed, the finding of a positive role model and a Hollywood “happy ending” was not the norm for Queer people viewing mainstream Hollywood films; consequently, the rise of independent film, particularly Queer film provides the missing viewing pleasure.

The rise of Queer film

As stated above, the film most often named by participants was *Desert Hearts* (1985), an independent lesbian film made in the tradition of a Hollywood romance. *Desert Hearts* (1985), was the most often mentioned of what can be called Queer films; meaning films made specifically with a Queer audience in mind. However, 16 (60%) respondents mentioned a Queer film as a part of their answers to the questionnaire and with duplicate naming a total on ten Queer films are mentioned in the data. The films

mentioned with their targeted audience were: *Beautiful Thing* (Gay), *But I'm a Cheerleader* (Lesbian), *Claire of the Moon* (Lesbian), *Desert Hearts* (Lesbian), *Eating Out* (Gay), *The Incredible True Adventure of 2 Girls in Love* (Lesbian), *Kissing Jessica Stein* (Lesbian), *Presque rien* (Gay), *Shelter* (Gay), and *Were the World Mine* (Gay).

Although these films are identified as appealing to a particular Queer audience they can still have mainstream appeal.

Thomas Wartenberg (1999) discusses the possibility of *Desert Hearts* (1985) not only appealing to heterosexual audiences but also being a pedagogical tool using “several interesting and innovative narrative and representational strategies aimed at depathologizing lesbianism” (p.204). He identifies the film as offering lesbian audiences affirming scenes never before available in a mainstream film. This comment is supported by several of the study’s respondents. One woman stated, “I was blown away that I could see a mainstream gay movie”. Another identified here reaction to seeing it as “Happiness”. While during a dialogue another participant stated that, it had not played in Sacramento when it was first released and she had to travel to San Francisco to see it. She then stated:

I was surprised it got made. That much money (although probably a small budget nonetheless) spent on the production of a movie, especially for a specialized subject and a specialized audience. So I'm surprised that in that time era, with a more specialized audience to go see this film, and just overall considering the times --- that the movie got made at all.

It was not cheaply made and did win some prizes at film festivals including an honorable mention for Donna Deitch at the 1986 Sundance Film Festival (IMBd, n.d.).

Another Queer film, which received critical acclaim from two of the questionnaire respondents and the larger Queer community as a whole, was *Shelter* (2007). This Gay romance won several awards at Gay and Lesbian festivals and praise from a participant who stated he felt: “compassion and pity” for the main character Zach. Zach’s plight in the film is having to choose his own happiness in a relationship over continuing to financially provide for his five year old nephew and disabled father.

The participants overwhelmingly felt affirmed to see Queer cinema that reflected their lives, hopes, and desires. One participant, on seeing the lesbian film *Gia* (1998) stated: “I remember being both moved and turned on by the film. There were times when I would watch it numerous times just to see two women make love”. While another woman found support in the lesbian romance, *Claire of the Moon* (1992). She identified her feelings about the character and film by stating: “A warm and funny character who fit in well with her queer community, but was frustrated when socializing with the dominant culture. My feelings brought up were happiness, joy, empathy”. These reactions to seeing a positive Queer identity on the screen again confirms the importance of positive role models in identity development.

One last factor on the importance of reflection of identity development, which was discussed in a few of the answers to the questionnaire, is the abolishment of the Queer character in a film when a book is translated for the big screen. The respondents alluded to two examples of this occurrence. The making of novels by Alice Walker, *The*

Color Purple and Fannie Flag, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* into mainstream Hollywood films changed the nature of the relationship between the two main female characters. In both cases, the lesbianism of the characters was changed to a non-sexual friendship. One respondent in reflection on *The Color Purple* provided her reaction to the Queer character as “None because it was not an outwardly gay character”. Self-esteem issues or internalized homophobia can be a result of finding yourself invisible to society. When mainstream film removes your representation from a work that you know has Queer content it is harmful to one’s self-image.

Summary

Film is a pedagogical tool, which influences the lives of all viewers, and Queer youth use film as another device to learn who they are and how to be as Queer people. The overriding theme perceived in the participants’ answers is how do the images of Queer people on the screen interact with my life and who I am? Whether the images were positive or negative, the respondents perceived their own life as Queer people reflected. For some viewers, the earlier images from the 1950s and 1960s provided messages that were frightening and may have contributed to thoughts of an imitative suicide. For other viewers, the Queer stereotypical images contributed to their internalized homophobia in creating cognitive dissonance between what they saw in film and who they felt they were as Queer people. As the twentieth century ended, the images became more positive. In addition, the end of the twentieth century also saw an increase in film made specifically for Queer people. Films made with Lesbian or Gay audiences

in mind were not always readily accessible but were received warmly by a Queer viewing public when they could be found.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Queer youth kill themselves at a rate estimated to be three times greater than their non-Queer counterparts do. Reasons considered in creating this disparity include the process of developing a healthy non-dominant sexual identity in a homophobic society such as this one. Many Queer and questioning youth find themselves isolated in their struggle to find their place in a hegemonic society. One of the factors which contributes to the difficulty Queer youth face in finding their identity is the viewing of positive role models. The media, particularly film, contribute to all identity development. Mainstream Hollywood film has been particularly toxic to Queer people due to the stereotypical images portrayed, the absence of Queer heroes, and the excessive number of Queer characters who end up dead before the end of the film.

To reprise themes discussed in detail in the literature review above; Cass(1979, 1984), and also Troiden (1981) exploring the process of Queer identity development found that during the first stage many people felt isolation and some considered suicide as an alternative to living as a Queer person. Information identified by Phillips and his colleagues (1974, 1980, 1982, 1986) on imitative suicide, connected the act of suicide as being possibly contagious for some following a media event. While Russo (1987) identified the toxic, Queer stereotypes affecting the self-esteem of the Queer film viewer. The combination of these theories leads to a conclusion that mainstream Hollywood film negatively affects Queer identity development. Queer and questioning youth are

impacted by cinema to the detriment of their self-esteem. In addition, for some the internalization of negative messages can lead to imitative suicide.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to use narrative inquiry to focus on the reflections of adults on what film meant to them as a part of their coming out process when they were young. Previous studies on imitative suicide and film gave limited consideration to youth and no consideration specifically to Queer youth. The two fold purpose of this study was to tie together some of the prior research on Queer identity development, Queer youth suicide and imitative suicide, and the toxic Queer stereotypes found in mainstream Hollywood cinema.

Conclusions

This final chapter analyzes the information from the participants and the literature to ascertain the answers to the original research questions. Those questions, again, are: 1- How do Queer youth develop their Queer identity? 2- Do mainstream Hollywood films influence the identity development of Queer youth? 3- Could the high rate of Queer youth suicide be related to the negative Queer images seen in mainstream Hollywood films? 4- Is there a relationship between imitative suicide and film? And; 5- Since the Stonewall Rebellion, have mainstream Hollywood films presented more positive Queer images?

Research Question 1: How do Queer youth develop their Queer identity?

The literature indicates that all youth require role models to learn how to perform their part in society. We, as a species, learn by observing. For a youth following a hegemonic pattern these role models are found everywhere, they exist all around him or her, not only in person, but in all media: literature, television, and in film. The journey for

a Queer youth can be and has been more difficult due to the absence of positive Queer role models. Historically, it has only been in the past 40 years that being Queer has not considered to be a mental health issue and/or a criminal problem. It is this absence of a large, out and proud Queer population, which makes the images found on film more problematic. For Queer and questioning youth, not finding abundant Queer role models at home, at school or in the neighborhood, makes the influence of the Queer images found in film much more impactful.

The respondents to this study reported how they had been influenced by the Queer characters they saw on film. The majority reported film as a major influence in developing their identity as Queer people. The next research question expands on the influence film has on identity development.

Research Question 2: Do mainstream Hollywood films influence the identity development of Queer youth?

The participants of this study overwhelmingly told stories of how they were influenced by the portrayals of Queer people they found in film. Many of the younger participants found joy and affirming images on the screen that they could follow. For the older respondents, the images they saw were much more toxic, including screens of depression, damage and death. The images from dramas of the 1950's and 1960's were so venomous that some respondents are still unwilling to view the films.

The responses from the questionnaire and the dialogues indicate that film of all types has an important influence on the identity development of Queer youth. Responses also indicate that mainstream Hollywood film, being the only film available to the

generation born before the Stonewall rebellion, had a major negative affect on that Queer generation. The respondents indicated that the lessons they took from film included the negative images of the bitchy, angry mean Queer person who would be shunned and scorned by the dominant population and that Queer people died because of their Queerness. These lessons did not support an easy acceptance of a Queer identity

A majority of all participants reported the struggles they had in their coming-out process. The timespan between coming out to oneself and to another reflects this struggle. Many identified the influence of seeing stereotypical images of Queer people in hampering their coming-out process and extending their struggle. The data shows a repeating pattern of seeing the first remember film containing a Queer person, the negative feeling generated from that viewing and then a number of years before the individual came out to another. The effect of the negative stereotypes in mainstream Hollywood film cannot be over stated in the harm done to Queer and questioning youth. The harm includes heightened rates of internalized homophobia up to and including thoughts and actions of suicide.

Research Question 3: Could the high rate of Queer youth suicide be related to the negative Queer images seen in mainstream Hollywood films?

This study concludes that the images of Queers in film while not directly causing Queer suicide, certainly does nothing to dissuade it. In the reflections of at least two of the respondents, we see that the images of Queer death may have encouraged thoughts of death for themselves. These reflections include one respondent who perceives a connection to seeing a suicide of the screen with his own suicide attempts.

The participants overwhelmingly told of toxic images, which affected their coming out process, their self-esteem and increased their internalized homophobia. The repetition of negative stereotypes caused many of the respondents to question what those images said about who they were. This type of questioning increases the isolation, depression and feelings of hopelessness identified in the literature as factors in a difficult Queer coming-out process. A fact supported by the length of time identified between the participants coming-out to themselves and to another.

The fact that from 1962 to 1978 almost 80% of the Queer characters on screen ended up dead was not lost on the participants. For many an equation between being Queer and being dead was drawn from the images seen at the movies. The next research question expands on the relationship on imitative suicide and film.

Research Question 4: Is there a relationship between imitative suicide and film?

This study supports the literature that finds a possible connection between viewing images of suicide and contemplating oneself following a suicidal path. There are two very relevant findings, in the literature on imitative suicide, that speak directly to this study. First, the literature points to imitative suicides occurring among young people to a greater extent than older people. The focus of this study is Queer youth, those between the ages of 15 and 24. The CDC identifies suicide as the third leading cause of death for this age group (CDC, 2008). Therefore, according to the literature all youth are susceptible to suicidal idealizations following viewing a film containing a suicide. However, the second factor from the literature puts Queer and questioning youth at greater risk when seeing a film containing the suicidal death of a Queer character. The

literature also states there is a greater probability for an imitative suicide if the viewer identifies with the character in the film. This is particularly relevant to Queer youth who may have fewer external role models. If all one sees is suicidal Queer characters, the pedagogical implications are that suicide is a “natural” outcome for a Queer person. There is a final factor not present in the literature on imitative suicide, which is the effect of repeated film examples of death by suicide of a character type with whom one identifies. All of these factors found in film support a finding that there is a relationship between imitative suicide and film. Creating a particularly deadly combination for Queer and questioning youth.

The study of imitative suicide is the most hypothetical of all the research in this thesis. The examples, from the participants and the ideas from the literature contribute to this theoretical exploration of suicide.

Research Question 5: Since the Stonewall Rebellion, have mainstream Hollywood films presented more positive Queer images?

The findings from this research indicate that since the mid-1980s the images of Queer people in film have become more positive. While there are still tragic Queer characters presented in Hollywood film today (i.e. *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and *Milk* (2008)), the tragic Queer is no longer the exclusive image. The darker, depressing dramas generated by Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s have given way to a “normalization” of Queer characters. Instead of an overwhelming number of tragic dramas, there has been the inclusion of lighter, cheerful comedies. These comedies that still contain harmful stereotypes but have the advantage of the Queer

character being alive at the end of the film. However, the respondents indicate that the major change for a Queer viewing public has been the production and distribution of films made especially for Gay and Lesbian audiences.

While the spread of Queer cinema is a benefit for Queer people in major cities, the absence of an independent theatre willing to show Queer film in more conservative areas still leaves many Queer and questioning youth without representations of themselves on the big screen. This absence still hampers the identity development of many Queer youth; as does the stereotypical images still supported by the Hollywood system. Examples of the comedies containing demeaning stereotypes named by the participants were *The Birdcage* (1996) and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for everything Julie Newmar* (1995). While these were the most recent mainstream comedies named Hollywood continues to produce similar films where being Queer is the joke. Recent examples of this form of humor are; *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* (2006), *I Now Pronounce you Chuck and Larry* (2007) and *The Hangover*, (2009). Seeing being Queer as something to make fun of and laugh about is homophobic and detrimental to the self-image of all Queer people.

Limitations

Perceived limitations of the study before it had been conducted were discussed in Chapter 1, limitations found in the methodology were discussed in Chapter 3 and in this last chapter, the limitations found in the study as a whole are included. In all three sections, the need for a diverse sample continues to be identified. Yet, although care was taken to make this study as representative as possible it is dominated by people who

identify as white or Caucasian and Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual. Further research including more people of color would yield different perspectives on the depictions in film. It is important to note that while there are limited positive examples for white Queers in film there are even fewer portrayals of Queer people of color. A similar observation must be made for people who identify as Transgender. This research included no one who identifies as Transgender while the examples of Transgender people in film are extremely limited and until *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) very stereotypical. Having representation from this group would definitely enhance the research.

The questionnaire used as a research tool provided useable data; however, definitions were not provided to focus respondent's answers. Providing definitions of what "mainstream Hollywood," meant would not guarantee participants did not include non-American film or independent film but it might limited the number of independent films titles provided. Along these same lines, I would now include a question that asks the participants what their favorite film containing a Queer character was and why they liked it.

Recommendations for Further Research

The interplay between homophobia, sexism, and patriarchal hegemony has been eluded to several times in this study however, is a topic large enough for another complete thesis.

Some of the literature spoke to a greater visibility of members of the non-dominant sexual orientations in other forms of media. This is true especially in television where shows like *Will and Grace* ran for many years and can still be found in re-runs. In

addition, subscription television has features such as *The L Word* that contains a lesbian theme. Television is outside the scope of this study but is worthy of the same attention. Live stage was another media form mentioned by a participant as being important to her Queer identity development. She had been to see the musical *Hair* and stated how freeing it had been to see two women kissing live on stage.

While this study focused on the effect film had on Queer viewers, the pedagogical implication of seeing negative Queer images in film is equally applicable to heterosexual people. Given that, Queer portrayals provide negative messages to Queer viewers what are the messages that non-Queer audience members receive? A study which considered the perceptions that young non-Queer participants took from the first film they saw containing a Queer character would also be informative. This additional study could be done either focusing on a heterosexual sample only or comparing and contrasting the perceptions of both the Queer and non-Queer participants.

The studies on imitative suicide are well documented in this study however; more research needs to be done in this area particularly pertaining to imitative youth suicide, imitative youth suicide and film, and imitative Queer youth suicide. It is acknowledged that the area of suicide is a particularly difficult area of study yet, more research needs to be done to decrease the loss of our greatest natural resource, our youth.

Conclusion

Three primary conclusions are made from the information generated by the questionnaire, dialogues, and literature review in this study. The first conclusion based in the participant information and supported by the literature is the effect film has on

identity development. Film is a pedagogical tool, which teaches how to perform ones identity in the world. The second and corollary lesson is that mainstream Hollywood film has provided and continues to provide, primarily negative images of Queer characters. As society becomes less homophobic and more accepting of non-dominant sexuality the images of Queer people in film have become less toxic, but even today negative, and demeaning Queer stereotypes are presented in mainstream film. Finally, a relationship between images of Queer people dying in film evoked ideas of death as an outcome for being Queer in some viewers. The research on imitative suicide by Phillips and his associates (1974, 1980, 1982, 1986) has provided insight into the possibility that suicide can for some individuals be contagious and that a film screen might be one of the means of becoming infected. The absence of an abundance of positive role models for Queer youth makes this particularly problematic.

Film is a pedagogical tool and among the things, it teaches is lessons of identity. Members of the audience learn how to perform their gender and sexuality according to the characters they see in cinema. Negative images of an identity with which a viewer identifies can create dissonance in the individual. Depending on other factors, this dissonance can be so great as to lead to suicide.

The images of Queer people in cinema have improved since their toxic reintroduction following the end of the prohibition of Queer images by the Production Code in 1962; however, young viewers still perceive negative messages about themselves while viewing mainstream film containing Queer characters. While recommending a continuance in positive Queer role models in mainstream Hollywood film the need for

more available independent Queer cinema is also suggested. The participants of this study found Queer heroes and positive outcomes for the enjoyment of a Queer audience were most often in cinema targeted for a Lesbian or Gay audiences. The problem for many Queer and questioning youth is in getting access to this genre of film. Therefore, not only does Hollywood need to expand its world view to include the stories of all marginalized people including Queer people; but also, independent film needs to be more available to a larger number of people.

Finally, the literature on imitative suicide although limited still suggests that media, including film, may increase the probability of some people killing themselves. One of the participants in this study perceived his own suicide attempts as an outcome of having seen *The Children's Hour* (1962) as a young man. He acknowledged several other repressive factors in his difficult struggle to live as an out, proud Gay man; but he alleged a definite connection between his self-destructive behavior and the message of shame and death by suicide he had learned in the film.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Data Collection Materials

- Human Subject Consent for Questionnaire
- Questionnaire: Effect of film on identity development
- Human Subject Consent for Dialogue

Part 1: Human Subject Consent Form-Questionnaire

My name is Gretchen Jung. I am a graduate student studying Bilingual and Multicultural Education at California State University, Sacramento. I am currently researching and preparing a thesis focused on the effect of mainstream Hollywood cinema on the identity of youth who may be Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, or other non-dominant sexuality. (Here after referred to as Queer.) It is possible that you and I are friends or acquaintances, but that should not influence whether or not you decide to participate in this research.

The study will investigate factors related to the negative portrayal of Queer people in film on the possible difficulty of coming out as a Queer youth. Many Hollywood films contain the death of the main Queer character. Queer youth commit suicide at a rate three times greater than their non-Queer counterparts. The possibility of a correlation between these two statements is the subject of this study. Although the study is focusing on the Queer youth the research is asking adults about their memories of this period in their lives. Consequently, you will be asked to disclose your age.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire about your experience with films containing Queer characters and your coming out process. The questionnaire is relatively short and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. In addition, some participants may be asked to partake in a focus group to discuss their responses to the questionnaire, films and their coming out process. It is anticipated that people who came out before Stonewall will have a different experience of film and the coming out process than those who came out later. This difference would be the center of attention of the focus group. The focus group discussion could also last up to two hours.

Some of the items in the questionnaires may seem personal, but you don't have to answer any question if you don't want to. The questions asked may bring up painful memories for you; should you feel the need to discuss these memories further the local Gay press contains names of Gay or Lesbian counselors to assist you with these memories. In addition, your local Gay Center, such as the Sacramento Gay and Lesbian Center, (916- 442-0185; 1927 L St, Sacramento, CA) has referrals to therapists.

You may gain additional insight into factors that affected your personal coming out. On the other hand you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial for programs designed to assist youth in their coming out process and reduce their disproportionate suicide rate, estimated at three times that of their non-queer peers.

Before any data can be collected, or research conducted, California State University, Sacramento requires the consent of all participants. By signing this form, you acknowledge Gretchen Jung's right to submit findings directly related to the conducted research for the sole purpose of production of scholarly work. The finding in this study will be reported using pseudonyms.

Knowledge of your participation in this project shall be limited only to parties required to know. Your responses on the questionnaires will be kept confidential. Only first names will be used in the focus groups, and you may use something other than your real name if you wish. With the permission of everyone in the group, the focus group discussion will be audio taped. Those tapes

will be destroyed as soon as the discussions have been transcribed, and in any event no later than one year after they were made. Until that time, they will be stored in a secure location. Further measures will be taken to secure participants' identity, including the use of pseudonyms when narrative discussion is included in the thesis.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Gretchen Jung by e-mail at g_jung@hotmail.com or by contacting my thesis advisor Professor Berta-Avila at bamargie@skymail.csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may opt out without any risk of consequence of reprisal. At any time you may decline to answer any question or series of questions. Your signature below indicates that you have read and agree to participate in the research.

Name (printed)

Age today

Signature

Date

If you would be interested in further discussion about this topic, please give a phone number where I can reach you for a follow up interview. _____

Part 2: Questionnaire: Effect of film on identity development

Statement of purpose: I am studying the effect mainstream Hollywood films may have on queer (non-dominant) sexual orientation. Your completion of this questionnaire is appreciated.

Age _____ Gender _____ Race _____

Sexual Orientation _____

1. Coming out to self: Age at which you **first** thought your sexual orientation might be other than heterosexual? _____

2. Approximate size of community in which you lived at age in question 1 above. _____

3. Now please think back to the first mainstream movie you saw that contained a queer character.

What was the name of that movie? _____

4. Approximately what year did you see it? _____

5. Please describe any feeling that the queer character brought up for you. _____

6. Was this queer character still alive at the film's end? Yes ____ No ____ Do not remember ____

7. Did you draw any conclusions from this outcome? Yes ____ No ____ Do not remember ____

(Please continue on the back)

8. If yes to Question 7, what conclusion(s) did you draw? _____

9. Coming out to another: Age at which you told someone else that you were not heterosexual?

10. Can you think of any other movies/films that influenced you in your queer/ non-heterosexual identity? _____

Thank you very much for your help.

(Additional comments) _____

Part 3: Human Subject Consent Form-Dialogues

My name is Gretchen Jung. I am a graduate student studying Bilingual and Multicultural Education at California State University, Sacramento. I am currently researching and preparing a thesis focused on the effect of mainstream Hollywood cinema on the identity of youth who may be Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, or other non-dominant sexuality. (Here after referred to as Queer.) It is possible that you and I are friends or acquaintances, but that should not influence whether or not you decide to participate in this research.

The study will investigate factors related to the negative portrayal of Queer people in film on the possible difficulty of coming out as a Queer youth. Many Hollywood films contain the death of the main Queer character. Queer youth commit suicide at a rate three times greater than their non-Queer counterparts. The possibility of a correlation between these two statements is the subject of this study. Although the study is focusing on the Queer youth the research is asking adults about their memories of this period in their lives. Consequently, you will be asked to disclose your age.

You are being asked to participate in a focus group discussion about your experience with films containing Queer characters and your coming out process. The discussion is more complex than the questionnaire you completed. It is anticipated that people who came out before Stonewall will have a different experience of film and the coming out process than those who came out later. This difference would be the center of attention of the focus group. The focus group discussion could last up to four hours.

Some of the topics in the focus group discussion may also seem personal, but you may participate as much or as little in the discussion as you wish. The questions and/or discussion may bring up painful memories for you; should you feel the need to discuss these memories further the local Gay press contains names of Gay or Lesbian counselors to help with dealing with these memories. In addition, your local Gay Center, such as the Sacramento Gay and Lesbian Center, (916- 442-0185; 1927 L St, Sacramento, CA) has referrals to therapists.

You may gain additional insight into factors that affected your personal coming out. On the other hand you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial for programs designed to assist youth in their coming out process and reduce their disproportionate suicide rate, estimated at three times that of their non-queer peers.

Before any data can be collected, or research conducted, California State University, Sacramento requires the consent of all participants. By signing this form, you acknowledge Gretchen Jung's right to submit findings directly related to the conducted research for the sole purpose of production of scholarly work. The finding in this study will be reported using pseudonyms.

Knowledge of your participation in this project shall be limited only to parties required to know. Only first names will be used in the focus groups, and you may use something other than your real name if you wish. Your responses during the focus group will be kept confidential. However, while confidentiality will be requested and expected of all focus group participants this cannot be guaranteed. With the permission of everyone in the group, the focus group discussion will be audio taped. Those tapes will be destroyed as soon as the discussions have been transcribed, and

in any event no later than one year after they were made. Until that time, they will be stored in a lock box at my home. Further measures will be taken to secure participants' identity, including the use of pseudonyms when narrative discussion is included in the thesis.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Gretchen Jung at g_jung@hotmail.com or by contacting my thesis advisor Professor Berta-Avila at bamargie@skymail.csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may opt out without any risk of consequence of reprisal. At any time you may decline to answer any question or series of questions. Your signature below indicates that you have read and agree to participate in the research.

Name (printed)

Age today

Signature

Date

Signature **In addition**, I give my permission for the dialogue to be recorded.

APPENDIX B

Data Collected

- Overview and Explanation of Information in this Appendix
- Spreadsheet of Participant Answers to Questionnaire
- Unexpurgated Transcript of Participant Responses to Questionnaire
- Filmography of all Film Titles Named in Questionnaire
- Transcript of Participant Dialogues

Part 1: Overview and Explanation of Information in this Appendix

The first item (identified as Part 2) in this appendix is the spreadsheet which was created from the questionnaires. Each participant was given an identification number to protect their identity which is found in column one. Columns A-D reflect answers to primarily demographic questions: Age, Gender, Race, Sexual Orientation. Columns 1 through 10 pertain to information relating to coming out as a non-heterosexual and film. The participants' words are recorded just as they were stated on the questionnaire. Where a participant did not respond to the symbol "dns", for did not state, is used in the cell to identify no response. Finally, any cell which contains an asterisk (*) signifies a clarifying comment by the respondent.

The second item (identified as Part 3) in this appendix is a complete transcription of the comments received from the questionnaire. Any item identified with an asterisk on the spreadsheet can be found in this transcript. Comments were generated primarily by three questions: Question 5, "Please describe any feeling that the queer character brought up for you" generated comments in 26 out of 27 responses. Question 8, "If yes to Question 7, what conclusion(s) did you draw"? generated comments in 13 of the 27 responses; and, 13 of the 27 respondents provided additional comments regarding the influence of media on their non-heterosexual identity. However, clarifying comments were made by respondents in regard to race, sexual orientation and the year a film was seen. The id number of the participant is given along with the question number for each

comment; in addition, for question 5, the name of the movie is listed prior to the response about the feeling generated.

The third item (identified as Part 4) in this appendix is a filmography of the films mentioned by the participants in response to question number 3 what was the name of the first mainstream movie you saw containing a queer character; and, question number ten, can you think of any other movies/films that influenced you in your queer/non-heterosexual identity? Films are listed alphabetically and include the year originally released, the director, the studio with country of origin, and the symbol(s) to reflect the film's genre(s)-C = Comedy, D = Drama, and R = Romance; in addition, the number in the last column, following the film citation reflects the number of participants specifying that film.

Finally, the final item (identified as Part 5) in this appendix is the transcript from the dialogues with three of the participants.

Part 2: Spreadsheet of Participant Answers to Questionnaire

ID #	(A) Age	(B) Gender	(C) Race	(D) Sexual Orientation	(1) Age first out	(2) Size of community	(3) Title first film seen with Queer portrayal	(4) Year film seen	(5) Feelings?	(6) Alive?	(7) Conclusions?*	(9) Age out to another	(10) Other influential films	Additional comments
1	24	F	Mixed	Gay	12	35,000	<i>The Object of my Affection</i>	1999	yes*	yes	none	14	<i>But I'm a Cheerleader</i>	none
2	61	F	Caucasian	Bisexual/ Lesbian*	23	2,500,000	<i>The Fox</i>	1968/69	yes*	no	yes*	31	<i>Victor/Victoria, Personal Best, Desert Hearts, Making Love</i>	Yes*
3	39	F	white	Lesbian	20	20,000	<i>Boys on the Side</i>	2000	yes*	yes	none	20	<i>The Incredible true adventure of 2 girls in love, Boys don't Cry</i>	Yes*
4	27	F	Persian	dns	13	dns	<i>Object of my Affection</i>	1997 ish?	yes*	yes	none	27	<i>Beautiful things</i>	none
5	44	F	Multi-racial	Gay	8-10*	dns	<i>Desert Hearts, Personal Best</i>	*	yes*	yes	yes*	10 or 11	<i>The Outsiders</i>	Yes*
6	19	M	Cambodian	Gay	12	250,000	<i>Philadelphia</i>	2005	yes*	no	yes*	18	<i>Shelter, Brokeback Mountain, Eating Out</i>	none
7	20	M	white	Gay	15ish	10,000	<i>Mean Girls</i>	year released	no*	yes	none	18 1/2	none	none
8	20	M	African American/mixed	Gay	12	20,000	<i>Rocky Horror Picture Show</i>	2010	yes*	no	none*	17	none	none
9	21	M	white	Gay	7	20,000	<i>Rocky Horror Picture Show</i>	1999	yes*	don't remember	none	18	<i>Were the world mine</i>	none
10	38	F	Asian	Bisexual/ Lesbian	28	600,000	<i>The Color Purple</i>	year released	yes*	yes	none*	30	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes, Some Kind of Wonderful, Thelma & Louise, Kissing Jessica Stein</i>	none

11	24	F	Chicana	Lesbian	15	20,000	<i>To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything</i>	2001	yes*	yes	none	17	none	none
12	23	M	Hispanic	Gay	16	600	<i>Shelter</i>	2009	yes*	yes	none	18	none	none
13	20	F	Multi-racial*	Bisexual	10	dns	<i>My Best Friend's Wedding</i>	1998	yes*	yes	don't remember	15	<i>The L Word</i> (TV)	Yes*
14	21	F	white	Queer	6	large city	<i>Gia</i>	1997	yes*	no	don't remember	9	none	none
15	19	F	Hispanic	Bisexual	17	dns	<i>Tamara</i>	2000/2003	yes*	don't remember	yes*	17	none	none
16	64	M	Caucasian	Gay	15	200	<i>Boys in the Band</i>	1970	yes*	don't remember	yes*	22	<i>Torch Song Trilogy</i> *	none
17	58	F	white	Lesbian	7th grade	dns	<i>Suddenly Last Summer</i>	early 1970s	yes*	no	don't remember	29	<i>The Children's Hour</i>	Yes*
18	65	F	white	Lesbian	5	family/30 or 40 people	<i>Desert Hearts</i>	1975?	yes*	yes	no	27	<i>Hair</i> (play)	Yes*
19	62	M	white	Homosexual	6	500,000	<i>Children's Hour</i>	1965	yes*	no	yes*	15	<i>A Lion in Winter, Suddenly Last Summer, Boys in the Band</i>	Yes*
20	57	M	white	Gay	12	2,000	<i>Boys in the Band</i>	1972	yes*	yes	yes*	21	<i>Cabaret</i>	none
21	71	M	African American	Gay	8	dns	<i>Suddenly Last Summer</i>	1959	yes*	no	yes*	18	none*	none
22	55	F	Caucasian	Lesbian	11	250,000	<i>Claire of the Moon</i>	1983	yes*	yes	yes*	17	<i>Brokeback Mountain</i>	none

23	26	M	Latino	Gay	14	60,000	<i>The Birdcage</i>	1996/97	yes*	don't remember*	no	17	<i>Boys Don't Cry, Rocky Horror Picture Show, But I'm a Cheerleader, American Beauty</i>	Yes*
24	21	F	Mexican-American	Lesbian	11	30,000	<i>But I'm A cheerleader</i>	2006/07	yes*	yes	no	17	none	Yes*
25	23	M	Multiracial	Gay	3 or 4	8	<i>To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything</i>	1995	yes*	yes	yes*	12	<i>Presuve-Rien(gj?), Broke Back Mountain, Queer As Folk, (TV)</i>	Yes*
26	59	F	white	Lesbian	16	800	<i>Desert Hearts</i>	1983	yes*	yes	don't remember	30	none	none
27	63	M	white	Gay	5 or 6	25,000	<i>Some Like it Hot, Midnigh Cowboy*</i>	1959, 1969*	yes*	*	*	6 or 7	Advise and Consent	Yes*

dns=did not state

*asterik indicates comments made

Part 3: Unexpurgated Transcript of Participant Responses to Questionnaire

Respondent 1-**Question 5:** (*The Object of My Affection*) “I remember feeling like I knew what it was like to be confused about feelings towards opposite sex friends when they liked me more than a friend”.

Respondent 2-**Item D:** “Bisexual (10%)/Lesbian (90%) forced choice: Lesbian”;

Question 5: (*The Fox*) “Two women-one neurotic (Sandy Dennis), other (brunette actress) seemed heterosexual. Sandy Dennis- slightly repellant; other actress-attractive. Didn’t relate to Sandy Dennis character; liked the other female character”. **Question 8:** “If you go outside convention, there is something wrong with you; and you can come to a bad end/ it is not safe”. **Additional comments:** “It is very hard to remember feelings as influenced by mainstream movies in my youth- especially as I was young some 40+ years ago. I also did not have the concepts or names of anything ‘gay’, ‘queer’, ‘lesbian’. I probably saw a lot of movies with gay characters that I don’t remember, didn’t ‘get’, or was in denial about whether I could relate to a character in a movie that was shown to be homosexual. Also, movies in the 1950’s, 1960’s and even 1970’s did not show explicit gay characters (and/or I was clueless). I do have a strong feeling that of all the movies I saw when I was young portrayed homosexuals in a negative light. Men were effeminate “fairies”; and women were mannish ‘bulldykes’, although I didn’t know those terms. I did know that I did not want to be like these characters and be on the receiving end of being shunned, disliked, or hated”.

Respondent 3-**Question 5:** (*Boys on the Side*) “I felt sad for her (the character’s) situation. I completely related to loving or liking someone that you could not have because I felt I couldn’t be me and be with another woman (not because the other person was straight like in the movie). **Additional comments:** “I am curious about how your research/thesis develops and the conclusions you reach, if any. If it is not too much trouble I would enjoy reading it once you are finished. This topic is one I have thought very little about until now and now I see that the impacts on me were strong”.

Respondent 4-**Question 5:** (*Object of my Affection*) “It wasn’t a person I could relate to. The character wasn’t someone I would have interacted with, so no feelings came up for me”.

Respondent 5-**Question 1:** “Between 8-10; I did not realize I was different ‘til I told a girl at age 11 (6th grade) that I liked her”. **Question 4:** “The year it came out on video”. **Question 5:** (*Desert Hearts- Personal Best*) “I was looking for answers to unknown questions/feelings. I knew I was different; I just didn’t understand how. Seeing the queer character’s personal struggles gave words, language to how I was feeling”. **Question 8:** “Hope. The queer characters offered hope. I felt like I wasn’t alone”. **Additional comments:** I do not really feel like movies/films influenced my “queer” identity-Movies/ films influenced what I was going thru as a teen like *Kramer va. Kramer* and *Author! Author!* I really did not know I was “gay” or “queer” until I saw movies like *Desert Hearts* or *Personal Best*, which gave language that put me in a box/package as dictated by society’s norms”.

Respondent 6-**Question 5:** (*Philadelphia*) “This is the first time I saw a queer character. I was sad that he was dying. I also felt afraid if I was gay that I would”. **Question 8:** “I thought all gay people would die”.

Respondent 7- **Question 5:** (*Mean Girls*) “There weren’t any [feelings]. I rarely attach myself or relate to any movie characters. The only character I really connected with is Kurt on *Glee*, but that’s only because of his initial relationship with his father that no longer applies though”.

Respondent 8-**Question 5:** (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) “I really loved Tim Curry’s character. Though it saddened me when he died”. **Question 8:** “A lot of people died in that movie but it did make me think about the feelings of society towards gays”.

Respondent 9-**Question 5:** (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) “Seeing the queer character gave me a sense of normalcy in how I act as well as giving me reinforcement in being different”.

Respondent 10-**Question 5:** (*The Color Purple*) “The scene where the singer kisses the main character (Whoopi Goldberg)-- it felt comforting, warm, sweet, and also at that time weird, unusual”. **Question 8:** “None because it was not an outwardly gay character”.

Respondent 11-**Question 5:** (*To Wong Foo, Thanks for everything [Julie Newmar]*) “It was a comedy, I was happy to see queer characters be vulnerable and accepted”.

Respondent 12-**Question 5:** (*Shelter*) “compassion and pity”.

Respondent 13- **Item C:** “Multiracial (Black & Mexican)” **Question 5:** (*My Best Friend’s Wedding*) “Intrigue, I didn’t really know what it meant. It was a gay man, so I didn’t feel much of a connection. I didn’t know people could be queer”.
Additional comments: “*The L Word* showed me that not all queer women fit the stereotype, that it’s okay not to”.

Respondent 14-**Question 5:** (*Gia*) “I remember being both moved and turned on by the film. There were times when I would watch it numerous times just to see two women make love”.

Respondent 15-**Question 5:** (*Tamara*) “One part was with guys and I was kind of shocked more because it was a horror movie but not disturbed. Then there was one with girls, and I felt happy comfortable”. **Question 8:** “I concluded that it was something I wanted to experience”.

Respondent 16-**Question 5:** (*Boys in the Band*) “To me, the characters were sad, depressing, bitchy, mean, bored, angry-“. **Question 8:** This is not who I am, nor is it who I want to become. I’ll find my own way”. **Question 10:** “*Torch Song Trilogy*-in the 80’s I think-no positive role models, as I recall-Nope, don’t want to be like them either”.

Respondent 17-**Question 5:** (*Suddenly, Last Summer*) “Tragic, Tennessee Williams is very intense. Sadness for the isolation”. **Additional comments:** “I had a hard time with this as I had more influence through novels. Harold Robbins”.

Respondent 18-**Question 5:** (*Desert of the Heart*) [Note: actual movie title is *Desert Hearts* the title given by the respondent, *Desert of the Heart* is the title of the

novel by Jane Rule upon which the movie is based] “I was blown away that I could see a mainstream gay movie”. **Additional comments:** “I saw the play *Hair* when I was twenty four or so and I think this play had the most profound effect on me. I thought I was the only person that felt attracted to other girls until I saw this play; and right on stage they had girls kissing girls. I was amazed. It made me think “I was alright” and I didn’t have to live a lie”!

Respondent 19-**Question 5:** (*Children’s Hour*) “How hopeless it was and unfair to be misunderstood. Choices are limited for gays”. **Question 8:** “The only way out of some serious situations is suicide”. **Additional comments:** “[My home town] was a very repressive town in the 1950’s. I came out in High School and broke up with my first lover at age 17. I was hospitalized for suicide attempt that year. I tried again twice. At age 20 I was drafted into the Army and went AWOL after being attacked and hospitalized with a cerebral concussion and 52 stitches. I thought the only way out of that situation was to get drunk enough some evening and kill myself. Eventually I met some friends who had their act together and things righted themselves”.

Respondent 20-**Question 5:** (*Boys in the Band*) “Excitement, knowing that I was not alone with my gayness”. **Question 8:** “That this was going to be a difficult journey”.

Respondent 21-**Question 5:** (*Suddenly, Last Summer*) “Not great. Last scene was not wonderful. Depicted a mob of young men that were allegedly molested by the main character. They tore him apart...”. **Question 8:** “Do not force yourself on

Heterosexuals”. **Question 10:** “No [other movies]. The primary reason for my response is because seeing any film with gays (especially in positive roles) tended to be affirming.

Respondent 22-**Question 5:** (*Claire of the Moon*) “A warm and funny character who fit in well with her queer community, but was frustrated when socializing with the dominant culture. My feelings brought up were happiness, joy, empathy”.

Question 8: “It’s ok to be queer. As with many cultures it’s okay to be queer, but it has its ups and down, challenges when mingling with the dominant group”.

Respondent 23-**Question 5:** (*The Birdcage*) “It made me very uncomfortable, though hilarious, made me “afraid” to be gay because of the sheer flamboyancy of the characters and yet they had to play straight to be accepted”. **Additional comments:** “My fear of my own sexuality was never so much from death or potentially dying, it was the often over-feminizing gay characters-it always made me very uncomfortable. I knew I was struggling with my sexuality but it scared me to death that I would end up acting like, and dressing up like women. I never understood as a kid why gay automatically had to mean girly, effeminate, and sissy. Though some are, not all are or have to be”.

Respondent 24-**Question 5:** (*But I’m a Cheerleader*) “Funny” **Additional comments:** Films don’t and never did influenced [sic] me in my non-heterosexual identity”.

Respondent 25-**Question 5:** (*To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar*) “The movie was about 3 strong drag queens on a cross country mission to compete in the Miss Drag USA competition. The characters empowered me because they

were in touch with their sexuality. In one scene of the film a man hits his wife and I remember my parents telling me that it was wrong for him to hit her. I always think about that moment, which for me was confirmation that it was far worse to hit your wife than to be gay (something they never made a negative comment about). To see men so in touch with everything that is empowering about being gay (being different, unique, stylish and fabulous) always gave me the courage to be myself". **Question 8:** "Being true to yourself is the only way to live".

Respondent 26-**Question 5:** (*Desert Hearts*) "Happiness"

Respondent 27-**Question 3:** (*Some Like it Hot*)-First men wearing a dresses; *Midnight Cowboy*-First actual gay characters. **Question 4:** Saw both in theater when first released; *Some Like it Hot* in 1959 and *Midnight Cowboy* in 1969.**Question 5:** In both movies, I could not identify with any of the characters-they were all from a different planet. If anything, they made me wonder what I was because I wasn't like any of them. **Question 6:** *Some Like it Hot* –yes; *Midnight Cowboy* Do not remember. **Question 7:** Conclusions drawn for *Midnight Cowboy* only. **Question 8:** In *Midnight Cowboy* I think the older character died, younger didn't, but both characters made me think gay life –style should be avoided at all costs! **Question 10:** *Advise and Consent*, 1962 vivid example of how deplorable gays were.

Additional Comments: You can pick #2 *Midnight Cowboys* if you need only an actual gay character as #1 *Like it Hot* were straight guys faking it, but "*Hot*" came first. It looks like I was full of self-loathing, but since I didn't identify AT ALL

with gay characters, I was very happy and contented being the non-gay gay boy[emphasis in the original].

Part 4: Filmography of all Film Titles Named in Questionnaire

Title	Year	Director	Studio and Country	Genre(s)*	Times Cited
<i>Advise and Consent</i>	1962	Preminger, Otto	Columbia Pictures , USA	D	1
<i>American Beauty</i>	1999	Mendes, Sam	DreamWorks, USA	D	1
<i>Beautiful thing</i>	1996	Macdonald, Hettie	Channel 4 Films, UK	C/D/R	1
<i>Birdcage, The</i>	1996	Nichols, Mike	United Artists, USA	C	1
<i>Boys Don't Cry</i>	1999	Peirce, Kimberly	Fox Searchlight, USA	D/R	2
<i>Boys in the Band</i>	1970	Friedkin, William	Cinema Centers Films, USA	D	2
<i>Boys on the Side</i>	1995	Ross, Herbert	Alcor Films, USA	C/D	1
<i>Brokeback Mountain</i>	2005	Lee, Ang	Alberta Films Entertainment, Canada	D/R	3
<i>But I'm a Cheerleader</i>	1999	Babbit, Jamie	Cheerleader LLC, USA	C/D	3
<i>Cabaret</i>	1972	Fosse, Bob	Allied Artists Pictures, USA	D	1
<i>Children's Hour, The</i>	1962	Wyler, William	United Artists, USA	D	2
<i>Claire of the Moon</i>	1992	Conn, Nicole	Demi-Mondo Productions, USA	D/R	1
<i>Color Purple, The</i>	1985	Spielberg, Steven	Warner Bros. Pictures, USA	D	2
<i>Desert Hearts</i>	1985	Deitch, Donna	Desert Hearts Production, USA	D/R	4
<i>Eating Out</i>	2004	Brocka, Q. Allan	Posh Pictures, USA	C	1

Film information obtained from IMDb (www.IMDb.com)

* Key: C=Comedy, D=Drama, R=Romance

Title	Year	Director	Studio and Country	Genre(s)*	Times Cited
<i>Fox, The</i>	1967	Rydell, Mark	Motion Pictures International, Canada	D	1
<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>	1991	Avnet, Jon	Universal Pictures, USA	D/C	1
<i>Gia</i>	1998	Cristofer, Michael	HBO Pictures, USA	D	1
<i>Incredible True Adventure of 2 Girls in love, The</i>	1995	Maggenti, Maria	Fine Line Pictures, USA	C/D/R	1
<i>Kissing Jessica Stein</i>	2001	Herman-Wurmfeld, Charles	Fox Searchlight, USA	C/D/R	1
<i>Lion in Winter, The</i>	1968	Harvey, Anthony	AVCO Embassy, UK	D	1
<i>Making Love</i>	1982	Hiller, Arther	Twentieth Century Fox, USA	D	1
<i>Mean Girls</i>	2004	Waters, Mark	Paramount Pictures, USA	C/D	1
<i>Midnight Cowboy</i>	1969	Schlesinger, John	United Artists, USA	D	1
<i>My Best Friend's Wedding</i>	1997	Hogan, P. J.	Tri-Star Pictures, USA	C/R	1
<i>Object of my Affection, The</i>	1998	Hyther, Nicholas	Twentieth Century Fox, USA	C/D/R	2
<i>Outsiders, The</i>	1983	Coppola, Francis Ford	Zoetrope Studios, USA	C/D/R	1

Film information obtained from IMDb (www.IMDb.com)

* Key: C=Comedy, D=Drama, R=Romance

Title	Year	Director	Studio and Country	Genre(s)*	Times Cited
<i>Personal Best</i>	1982	Towne, Robert	Geffen Company, USA	D	2
<i>Philadelphia</i>	1993	Demme, Jonathan	Tri-Star Pictures, USA	D	1
<i>Presque rien</i>	2000	Lifshitz, Sébastien	Lancelot Films, France	D/R	1
<i>Rocky Horror Picture Show, The</i>	1995	Sharman, Jim	Twentieth Century Fox, UK	C	3
<i>Shelter</i>	2007	Markowitz, Jonah	GP Pictures, USA	D/R	2
<i>Some Kind of Wonderful</i>	1987	Deutch, Howard	Paramount Pictures, USA	D/R	1
<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	1959	Wilder, Billy	United Artists, USA	C	1
<i>Suddenly, Last Summer</i>	1959	Mankiewicz, Joseph L.	Columbia Pictures Corporation, USA	D	3
<i>Tamara</i>	2005	Haft, Jeremy	Integrated Films & Management, Canada	Horror	1
<i>Thelma & Louise</i>	1991	Scott, Ridley	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA	D	1
<i>To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar</i>	1995	Kidron, Beeban	Universal Pictures, USA	C	2
<i>Torch Song Trilogy</i>	1988	Bogart, Paul	New Line Cinema, USA	C/D/R	1
<i>Victor/Victoria,</i>	1982	Edwards, Blake	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA	C/R	1
<i>Were the world mine</i>	2008	Gustafson, Tom	SPEAKproductions, USA	C	1

Film information obtained from IMDb (www.IMDb.com)

* Key: C=Comedy, D=Drama, R=Romance

Part 5: Transcript of Participant Dialogues

Female (id #3)

Gj: “One of the reasons I wanted to talk with you about film was on your questionnaire you said you had never thought before about the influence of film on your identity development as a Lesbian. Can you say more about that”?

R-3: “Growing up I was raised Catholic, in a very traditional family. We stressed civic duty and were very status quo. I had never thought about not having any [Queer] representations before answering this questionnaire. You really couldn’t find it. Maybe in the Tv series Cagney and Lucy it was implied and people made fun of it. Ellen’s coming out show was the first positive image I remember”.

Gj: “Can you tell me more about your response to *Boys on the Side*”?

R-3: “The thing about Lesbian characters in Hollywood film is they don’t get the traditional Hollywood ending. That is they don’t live happily ever after. I want that for my life. Hollywood films have promised me that ending but I never see it with Queer characters. The indication is, that if you are a Lesbian then you can’t have the traditional ending”.

Gj: “Can you think of any films that had the kind of ending you are looking for?”

R-3: “Yes. *If these Walls Could Talk 2* in the final scene it’s positive. The film builds, you know? The first scene is very negative and the second is still kind of negative but the final scene with Ellen is positive. They have a baby they get what they want. But that is the only example that I can think of where they have the Hollywood ending”.

Gj: You mentioned *Boys Don’t Cry*. Can you talk to me about that film”?

R-3: “*Boys Don’t Cry* is just terrible, everyone is weird. And he just wanted to be himself. And they kill him for that. Saw it once, don’t ever have to see it again. It is just so sad”.

Gj: “What I hear you say is that some of the messages you got from your family or others were not good about being Queer and then the film you saw just reinforced that negativity”.

R-3: “Yes, being raised Catholic and all. My folks were not supportive of my being a Lesbian. They say stuff, like when I broke up with a girlfriend, my mom said, ‘So, now will you start dating men’? They just don’t get it”.

R-3: “I just ended a nine year relationship. I wanted the happy ever after but just didn’t get it. Expectations of what life should be come from straight film with Hollywood endings. As a kid I liked *King and I*. That is what I was looking for the traditional strong man, woman being taken care of thing”.

Gj: “I think you added something about the film *To Wong Foo, thanks for everything, Julie Newmar*, and it isn’t a film I get. Can you tell me what you find attractive about it?”

R-3: “Yes, it is the way they expressed themselves. They are free and they like each other and it’s an adventure. It felt good to me, yes, that’s it. It was a feel good movie”!

Male (id # 19)

Gj: “Can you tell me more about the first time you saw *The Children’s Hour*? I don’t remember our ever talking about this film but when I read your response it was so close to my own I worried I had somehow contaminated my own research”.

R-19: “No, I don’t think we have ever talked about this before. I saw *Children’s Hour* on tv in black and white and learned that’s what happened when you’re gay. If you are gay you have to kill yourself”.

Gj: So what was it about the film that it had such an impact on you?

R-19: “It is the shame she feels at being Queer. Then after that big confession, she just goes off and hangs herself. How could you not be affected by seeing that when you’re a kid”?

Gj: Can you think of other films you saw around that time which had an effect on you?

R-19: “*Suddenly, Last Summer* saw it once as a kid. While my folks were at work and I was taking care of the younger kids. Boy that was an awful ending--ugh. The whole thing about that movie is that it is dangerous. Being gay is about being manipulative, being sly”.

R-19: “I didn’t know exactly what was going on, I was pretty young at the time maybe early teens; but I do remember the ending and how horrified I was—they just cannibalized him. Yuck! I’ve seen it [*Suddenly, Last Summer*] several times since and I still can’t stand the ending. There is something else going on in that film a feeling of manipulation. What I took from it was to be Gay was not only dangerous but also in some way shady or unscrupulous”.

Gj: “On your questionnaire you mention *Lion in Winter* as an influential Queer film. I saw it but don’t remember any Queer element can you tell me more about that”?

R-19: “Sure, I like *Lion in Winter* it is a positive image for Gays. Henry’s son is Gay, and he is “outed”. Nobody dies but he can’t be king because he is Gay. I might have just liked it because he was Gay and good looking”.

Gj: “Several people talked about *Boys in the Band*, what is your experience to this film”?

R-19: “The thing about *Boys in the Band* is that I just wanted to see a movie about other Gays. I just liked that it was a queer movie and nobody dies. Lots of Queer drama. “What I remember best about it is the line, ‘Who do you have to screw to get a drink?’”

Gj: You’ve always liked film a lot, what else do you have to say about being Queer and film?

R-19: “Queer icons, like Bette Davis and Judy Garland, didn’t know they were Gay icons but I really liked them. Felt *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* was amazing. “I took my mom to see it because those were her favorite actresses and she was horrified. I liked it, may have been the Hollywood connection and my love of film”.

R-19: “[My hometown] was so repressive, the homophobia, racism and oppression. All my friends just wanted to get out. They would leave but then they would come back, unable to make it in the big city of LA or SF. I was afraid that would happen to me too”.

Female (id #2)

(This conversation began over breakfast one day and then continued via email over the next two days.)

Gj: *Desert Hearts* was the most named film in my questionnaire, which I was pleased at this result but found it surprising.

R-2: “I was always amazed that she was able to make that movie. Where did she get the money? It wasn’t a little cheap film. I remember that we had to go to San Francisco to see it, they didn’t play it here in Sacramento. And San Francisco, is San Francisco, it played at some small theatre”.

Gj “Are you sure? I thought I saw it at the Tower.”

R-2 “Well, maybe later, but when it was first released we had to go to San Francisco to see it.”

[Conversation at the Fox and Goose, 2011]

Gj wrote in an email- “I was reflecting on something that one of the other participants said on the questionnaire about *Desert Hearts* and I included your memory about going to SF to see it. I also heard you say, "San Francisco is San Francisco" which I took to mean Sac is conservative and more homophobic while SF is a gay mecca. I also heard you say, "I was surprised that she made it." Can you say more about that? And if you do, do I have your permission to use it? Maybe I should come over and interview you on this with my tape recorder.”

Respondent answered via email:

R-2: ‘I’m surprised she made it’ --- ??? She, meaning the director? I meant I was surprised it got made. That much money (although probably a small budget nonetheless) spent on the production of a movie, especially for a specialized subject and a specialized audience. I believe the movie was based on the book, which was very popular -- but not main stream. So I’m surprised that in that time era, with a more specialized audience to go see this film, and just overall considering the times --- that the movie got made at all. Today, I would expect it to be an HBO film or something.

The next day an additional email was received. Respondent-2 continued via email:

R-2: “Having slept on it, here's what I meant about SF and Sac:

It (is) was more "OK" to be gay in San Francisco than in Sacramento. San Francisco was a more open, and more perceived to be tolerant, environment. (If there's anywhere where it is "OK" to be gay, San Francisco is that place.)

Whereas, not that Sacramento was necessarily more homophobic, it's that being gay here was a more invisible and closeted situation. Most people were not very open about being gay here in Sacramento.

This SF vs. Sacramento dynamic was even more true in the mid-1980s when *Desert Hearts*, the movie, came out.

Remember, at that time, you had to go to the one specialty store in town - a feminist bookstore - to get any books with a gay subject or theme. You often had to order these books from specialized publishers, otherwise they weren't available. (Now there are sections in chain bookstores and Amazon, etc.) If all this was true of books and literature, it was even far more true of movies. And any movie like *Desert Hearts*, which was not a completely negative movie about a gay character, was a unique movie for the times. Travelling to a major city to see it was what you had to do if you wanted to see it. Since there weren't very many, if any, movies like this, one would travel the distance to see a positive, gay themed movie.

There. Those are my thoughts behind what I said to you yesterday.”

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