

# South Africa's Celluloid Closet: The Reproduction of Hollywood LGBTQ+ Stereotypes and Tropes in South African Films.



Dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Film  
(Drama and Theatre Studies) at the University of Stellenbosch.

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December 2022

# Declaration

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# Abstract

The recurring stereotypes and tropes that arise in films depicting LGBTQ+ characters have negative impacts on how LGBTQ+ people see themselves, each other, and how other people see them. These depictions also promote homophobic myths and heteronormative ideologies. This dissertation provides a comprehensive exploration of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes and examines how these are reproduced in South African films. Therefore, the methodology consists of a qualitative semiotic analysis of LGBTQ+ representations to determine the value of, and meanings behind these depictions. The primary films consist of five South African queer-films that were released in the last decade, namely: Oliver Hermanus's *Skoonheid* (2011), John Trengove's *Inxeba* (2017), Christiaan Olwagen's *Kanarie* (2018), Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* (2018), and Oliver Hermanus's *Moffie* (2019). These films are evaluated according to five criteria to determine whether they constitute fair LGBTQ+ representations. My criteria state that a film's LGBTQ+ character(s) must be explicitly queer, not conform to most stereotypes or tropes, be complex and experience growth, not be a token character, and not embody the Other.

Most of Hollywood's mainstream films fail to meet these criteria and depict LGBTQ+ characters in line with outdated practices. Similarly, South Africa's films also fail to meet the criteria – with single exceptions – and perpetuate regressive myths about LGBTQ+ people. Although the five primary queer-films offer more complex LGBTQ+ representations, many employ harmful tropes that vilify or Other LGBTQ+ people. Notably, *Kanarie* and *Rafiki* subvert the more harmful tropes, pointing to the possibility of better future LGBTQ+ representations in South African films.

These findings indicate a need for new types of queer-films and LGBTQ+ depictions in Hollywood and South African films, and problematise the ways in which LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes are discussed in academia. Moreover, the findings support existing theories on how identities and meanings are constructed and distributed. Finally, this dissertation serves as a call for, and template of, further research into transgender- and bisexual-specific stereotypes in mainstream films.

# Opsomming

Die herhalende stereotypes en trope wat gebruik word in films wat LGBTQ+-karakters uitbeeld het 'n negatiewe impak op hoe LGBTQ+-mense hulself en mekaar sien, en hoe ander mense hulle sien. Hierdie uitbeeldings bevorder ook homofobiese mites en heteronormatiewe ideologieë. Hierdie skripsie bied 'n omvattende ondersoek na Hollywood se LGBTQ+-stereotipes en -trope en bestudeer hoe hierdie uitbeeldings in Suid-Afrikaanse films gerepliseer word. Hierdie uitbeeldings word ondersoek deur die kritiese ontleding van Suid-Afrikaanse “queer”-films ten einde vas te stel hoe die geïdentifiseerde stereotypes en trope daarin aangewend word. Die metodologie bestaan dus uit 'n kwalitatiewe semiotiese ontleding van LGBTQ+-representasie ten einde die waarde en betekenis daarvan vas te stel. Die primêre films bestaan uit vyf Suid-Afrikaanse “queer”-films wat gedurende die afgelope dekade vrygestel is, naamlik: Oliver Hermanus se *Skoonheid* (2011), John Trengove se *Inxeba* (2017), Christiaan Olwagen se *Kanarie* (2018), Wanuri Kahiu se *Rafiki* (2018), en Oliver Hermanus se *Moffie* (2019). Hierdie films word aan die hand van vyf kriteria geëvalueer ten einde te bepaal of die LGBTQ+-uitbeeldings daarin vervat, billik is. Die kriteria bepaal dat 'n film se LGBTQ+-karakter(s) eksplisiet “queer” moet wees, nie aan die meeste stereotypes en trope konformeer nie, kompleks moet wees en karaktergroei ondergaan, nie 'n tokenkarakter is nie, en nie die “Ander” beliggaam nie.

Die meeste van Hollywood se populêre films voldoen nie aan hierdie kriteria nie en beeld LGBTQ+-karakters volgens uitgediende praktyke uit. Suid-Afrikaanse films faal eensgelyks ook daarin om aan die kriteria te voldoen – met enkele uitsonderings – en sit regressiewe mites oor LGBTQ+-mense voort. Hoewel die vyf primêre “queer”-films kompleksere LGBTQ+-karakters bevat, wend baie daarvan skadelike trope aan wat LGBTQ+-mense aftakel of tot die Ander maak. Dit is opmerklik dat *Kanarie* en *Rafiki* die skadeliker trope omverwerp, wat op die moontlikheid van beter toekomstige LGBTQ+-uitbeeldings in Suid-Afrikaanse films dui.

Hierdie bevindings wys op 'n behoefte aan nuwe tipes “queer”-films en LGBTQ+-uitbeeldings in Hollywood en Suid-Afrikaanse films, en problematiseer die wyse waarop LGBTQ+-

stereotipes en trope in die akademiese omgewing hanteer word. Voorts ondersteun die bevindings bestaande teorieë rondom die vorming en verspreiding van identiteit en betekenis. Laastens, dien die skripsie as 'n oproep tot en templaar vir toekomstige navorsing in transgender- en biseksueelspesifieke stereotipes in populêre films.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank:

My supervisor, Dr Annel Pieters, for her patience and empathy throughout the duration of this research process. For not only putting up with, but actually engaging with, my more controversial ideas – like arguing that *Skoonheid* is a romantic comedy with a tragic ending – and, most importantly, for alerting me when I was “rabbit-holing” on an idea and guiding me back on track.

My unofficial academic mentor, Dr Naudé Scribante, for taking me under his wing during the Pandemic and helping me navigate the research process.

My friends, especially Peter Baumeister, for always lending an ear and offering insights, and, most memorably, making sure that I got enough fresh air.

Finally, but crucially, to Pieter Scribante. Thank you for your love and support; for the countless hours you spent listening to me ramble about the films I recently watched and all the time and energy you spent on helping me with final revisions. I love you.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## On Representation

*The Celluloid Closet* deals with the past – where we came from. It is not meant to be the last word on this subject; it is meant to be a beginning – a starting point from which further, more specific analyses of where we’re going may emerge.<sup>1</sup>

Film theory is concerned with how film, as an art, imitates life. As the first to critically analyse performance media, Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, defines performative storytelling as “artistic imitation.”<sup>2</sup> Characters are the modes through which the film medium imitates people, and for this reason, “character must be true to life.”<sup>3</sup> Viewers have come to assume that characters represent people, meaning that imitation through character is understood as representation. However, the process of human imitation is cyclical because imitation is an instinctive human practice.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, art imitates life, and in turn, life imitates art. This is the power of representation. Unfortunately, Hollywood films have largely failed to represent LGBTQ+<sup>5</sup> people and have, instead, depicted them through fictional caricatures, known as stereotypes. This dissertation explores the reproduction of mainstream Hollywood stereotypes in South African (SA) film depictions of LGBTQ+ characters.

For the purposes of this dissertation, specific existing terminology is employed, which requires clarification. Historically, language has been weaponised against the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, the terms and phrasings employed in this dissertation have been carefully considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, revised ed. (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1995), 326.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> The abbreviation LGBTQ+ refers to people who are: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and otherwise non-gender conforming, not heteronormative, and allies. There are many iterations of this abbreviation, it is updated frequently, and the order is not consistent. For the purpose of this study, I utilize the most common version of the abbreviation.

The term “homosexuality” was developed to describe same-gender-desire (SGD) as a pathology.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I avoid employing the terms “homosexual” and “homosexuality” and only include the terms as part of quotes. Instead, I employ the abbreviation SGD to refer to people who are attracted to the same gender.

Next, the terms “gay” and “lesbian” are Americanisms assigned to specific identities that SGD men and women identify with. However, outside of academia, these terms refer to SGD men and women, respectively, regardless of their cultural identities. As some stereotypes and tropes include these terms in their names, and many scholars use them to refer to SGD men and women in general, I employ them according to common use.

Finally, this dissertation refers to people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community as “LGBTQ+” people and “queer” people. The term “LGBTQ+” aims to include all of the relevant identities and, like the terms “gay” and “lesbian,” is the most common way to refer to people who do not identify with heteronormative ideologies. The term “queer” is more contentious. Not all members of the LGBTQ+ community approve of the reappropriation of the word, and many do not identify as queer. Therefore, I do not employ the term to describe people or groups; instead, I use it in line with the tradition of other queer theorists who label LGBTQ+ related works as “queer politics,”<sup>7</sup> “Queer Theory,”<sup>8</sup> and so forth.

Film is a powerful medium of influence used to create and perpetuate notions of normativity and otherness to uphold social power structures.<sup>9</sup> This is best illustrated in Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s book *Manufacturing Consent*,<sup>10</sup> which explores how “soft power”<sup>11</sup> creates the illusion that mass media is not controlled by “the dominant elite.”<sup>12</sup> However, “money and

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<sup>6</sup> Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Pub., 2006): 4.

<sup>7</sup> Nadia Davids and Zethu Matebeni, “Queer Politics and Intersectionality in South Africa,” *SAFUNDI: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 18, no. 2 (2017): 161-167.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah P. Britzman, “Is there a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight,” *Educational Theory* 45, no. 2 (1995): 151-165.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Enquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982), 777-795.

<sup>10</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Power obtained and exercised through financial influence instead of blatant censorship.

<sup>12</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 1.

power...[enable] the government and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public”<sup>13</sup> in a way that seems unenforced. This propaganda model focuses on news media; however, this same model is applied to mainstream films.

Films that reinforce the status quo are more likely to attract investors and large production houses, while more critical films remain limited to “independent” or “alternative” cinema.<sup>14</sup> I argue that, in the United States of America (USA), Hollywood is a powerful propaganda machine that does not reflect social attitudes but dictates them by promoting conservative ideologies. In the same way, under the Apartheid regime, the South African film industry was used by the authoritarian government and the South African Defence Force (SADF) as a propaganda machine to perpetuate Afrikaner Nationalist and Christian Purist mythologies.<sup>15</sup> Both industries have a history of censorship – which is discussed in 1.1 – and, despite the fall of their respective oversight bodies, both industries still produce films that perpetuate conservative mythologies. As a much younger and smaller industry,<sup>16</sup> South Africa’s films copy Hollywood’s stereotypes and tropes and, in effect, perpetuate Hollywood-specific myths of LGBTQ+ people.

Determining the quality of representation poses new complications. Measuring the “positivity” of representation is both limiting and subjective.<sup>17</sup> Positive or “good” characters can still be stereotypical, as seen in the Damsel<sup>18</sup> and the Uncle Tom stereotypes.<sup>19</sup> These characters are not villains, but the stereotypes are still degrading to women and people of colour. Therefore, accuracy (how closely a character resembles the people they are meant to represent) and complexity (non-stereotypical) are more important aspects to consider.

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<sup>13</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Thi Minh-ha Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 88.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobus Johannes Bothma, “‘Hemel op die *Platteland*’: The Intersections of Land and Whiteness in Selected Afrikaans Language Films: 1961-1994,” (MA diss, University of Pretoria, 2017), 66.

<sup>16</sup> Hollywood was established by the late 1800s whereas South Africa only started producing films after the turn of the century and South African films have significantly smaller budgets than Hollywood films. Martin P. Botha, “110 Years of South African Cinema (Part 1).” *Kinema* (2006).

<sup>17</sup> Rober Stam and Louise Spence, “Colonialism, Racism and Representation.” *Screen* 24, no. 2 (1983), 9.

<sup>18</sup> The damsel in distress is a woman character who is “passively feminine and ready to swoon in the arms of [...] heroes. Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Images*, 261.

<sup>19</sup> “The Uncle Tom character was a black house slave who faithfully served his white master.” Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 76.

This chapter explores the history of LGBTQ+ representation in Hollywood, which informs the current LGBTQ+ character depictions in the USA and SA. I highlight the specific research problem that this dissertation explores by identifying the gaps that persist in the literature. Thereafter, I formulate my research aims, objectives, and questions. Next, I explain the significance of my research to the field of LGBTQ+ representation in film and, lastly, provide an outline to the succeeding chapters.

## 1.1 Background

LGBTQ+ experiences have been erased from history.<sup>20</sup> Mark S. Kende – the author of *Constitutional Rights in Two Worlds: South Africa and the United States*<sup>21</sup> – offers a thorough overview of the historical and current<sup>22</sup> judicial rights of LGBTQ+ people in the two countries. In the USA, “gay marriage rivals abortion as one of the most controversial constitutional issues.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the country’s relatively progressive appearance, proclaiming itself as the “land of the free,”<sup>24</sup> LGBTQ+ Americans do not enjoy the same freedoms as their heteronormative counterparts. This is exemplified by the fact that most states still allow the use of the “gay panic” or “trans panic”<sup>25</sup> defence in homicide cases.<sup>26</sup> A more recent example of the USA’s oppression of LGBTQ+ people is the “Parental Rights in Education” bill, better known as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill which was signed into Florida state law in February of 2022. The bill limits schools from discussing LGBTQ+ identities, history, and issues in the classroom.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Laura Smith, “It’s Time to Stop Erasing Queerness from History: Why does History insist on ‘Straight Until Proven Gay’?”, *The Odyssey*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/gay-history>.

<sup>21</sup> Mark S. Kende, “Gay Rights,” in *Constitutional Rights in Two Worlds: South Africa and the United States*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 133-161.

<sup>22</sup> Up until 2009 when the book was published

<sup>23</sup> Kende, “Gay Right”, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Scott Key, composer, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1942).

<sup>25</sup> A “legal strategy that asks a jury to find that a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity/ expression is to blame for a defendant’s violent homicide.” Darius White, “A Multinational Overview of LGBTQ+ Panic Defense in remembrance of its Victims,” *Townson University Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 2 (2021): 72.

<sup>26</sup> The LGBTQ+ Bar Editors, “LGBTQ+ ‘Panic’ Defense Legislature Map,” *The LGBTQ+ Bar*, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://lgbtqbar.org/programs/advocacy/gay-trans-panic-defense/gay-trans-panic-defense-legislation/>.

<sup>27</sup> “What is the US state of Florida’s so-called ‘don’t say gay’ bill?” *Al Jazeera*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/24/what-is-us-state-of-floridas-so-called-dont-say-gay-bill>.

By contrast, in 1998<sup>28</sup> “South Africa [became] the first nation to prohibit sexual orientation discrimination in its Constitution.”<sup>29</sup> This prohibition was only enacted after the abolition of apartheid because the “conservative white religious Afrikaner culture that imposed apartheid had a notorious history of sexual Puritanism.”<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, despite South Africa’s progressive constitution, the social sphere is relatively conservative and, more troubling, homophobic.<sup>31</sup> Martin Botha, a South African film scholar, notes that SA’s film industry is also less progressive than the country’s constitution:

Despite South Africa’s progressive constitution which prohibits discrimination against gays and lesbians, as well as a strong gay movement, South African cinematic images of gay men and women are limited and still at the margin of the South African film industry.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.1.1 Hollywood’s and South African film industry’s backgrounds

The restrictions enforced upon Hollywood and the South African film industry ensured the prolonged invisibility of LGBTQ+ people in films. Hollywood shaped South Africa’s depictions of LGBTQ+ people. In turn, Hollywood’s depictions were shaped – and are still influenced – by the Motion Picture Production Code (the Code) of 1934.<sup>33</sup> The history of LGBTQ+ representation in Hollywood is directly linked to Hollywood’s and the US’s socio-political history. The tightening and loosening of censorship of onscreen LGBTQ+ images have been cyclical rather than linear. Central to this cyclical pattern of restrictions is the Production Code of the 1930s that, for the first time in Hollywood’s history, forced filmmakers to remove LGBTQ+ characters and stories from their films.

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<sup>28</sup> Kende, “Gay Rights”, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Kende, “Gay Rights”, 135.

<sup>30</sup> Kende, “Gay Rights”, 135.

<sup>31</sup> Kende, “Gay Rights”, 151.

<sup>32</sup> Martin P. Botha, “The Representation of Gays and Lesbians in South African Cinema 1895-2013,” *Kinema* (2013): 1.

<sup>33</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Images*, 29.

From an LGBTQ+ representation perspective, Hollywood's history can be divided into four eras: Pre-Code (the 1880s-1933): Hollywood without any oversight, Code-Era (1934-1961): Hollywood under the enforcement of the Production Code, which led to LGBTQ+ characters literally being “written off the screen,”<sup>34</sup> and caused filmmakers to master the art of queer-coding finally, Post-Code (1962-1999): Hollywood films freely depicting LGBTQ+ people but usually in negative ways, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hollywood (2000 – 2021): LGBTQ+ representation has become more prevalent and more complex but still leaves much to be desired.

Before the Code was enforced upon Hollywood filmmakers (Pre-Code Hollywood: 1880 – 1933), LGBTQ+ characters were portrayed in films. These depictions sometimes included orgies,<sup>35</sup> which led to protests by conservative bodies such as The National Legion of Decency against “immoral” movies.<sup>36</sup> Fear of government intervention drove Hollywood production companies to establish their own self-enforced censorship document, the Code, drafted and enforced by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). Will Hays headed the MPPDA and, consequently, the Code is also referred to as the Hays Code.<sup>37</sup> This era of censorship is known as Code-Era Hollywood (1934 – 1961), and filmmakers turned to queer-coding,<sup>38</sup> which led to the creations of most of the LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

In 1961, the Code was amended to “allow the depiction and discussion of homosexuality... with ‘care, discretion, and restraint.’”<sup>39</sup> This amendment signifies the start of the Post-Code Hollywood era (1962 – 1999). The first Hollywood films that centred around LGBTQ+ identity and experiences were tragedy-filled melodramas wherein:

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Mangin, “College Course File: The History of Lesbians and Gays on Film”, *Journal of Film and Video* 41, no. 3 (1989): 50.

<sup>35</sup> As seen in *The Sign of the Cross*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (USA: Paramount Pictures) 1932.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory D. Black, “Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940”, *Film History* 3, no. 3 (1989): 167.

<sup>37</sup> Black, “Hollywood Censored”, 167.

<sup>38</sup> The practice of implying that a character is attracted to the same gender by having said character act and speak in a way that viewers have come to associate with same-gender attraction.

<sup>39</sup> Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2004): 312.

gays dropped like flies, usually by their own hand, while continuing to perform their classical comic function in lesser and more ambiguous roles.<sup>40</sup>

These films depicted same-gender attraction as a tragic flaw and advocated for sympathy toward those “suffering” from homosexuality. The 60s also saw an increase in demands for fair representations of different groups. Despite the rise in the representation of women and people of colour and the cultural shift away from Code-Era ideals, LGBTQ+ representation remained on the margins of narratives and limited to existing stereotypes and tropes. The only exception to this was *The Boys in the Band*<sup>41</sup> that centred around five distinctly different gay men and explored the complex dynamics found in relationships between members of the gay community.<sup>42</sup>

Although filmmakers of the 1960s were allowed to portray LGBTQ+ people, most Hollywood films still depicted them according to Code-Era stereotypes and tropes. Given that Post-Code Hollywood was also allowed to portray explicit sex and extreme violence, for the first time in decades, LGBTQ+ characters were often portrayed as sexual deviants<sup>43</sup> or violent characters.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, some of the more damaging LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes were created during this era.

Throughout this era, the LGBTQ+ community continued to fight for representation and started to read queerness into otherwise intended heteronormative films. This practice of “double reading” came to be known as “camp” and generated its own subculture. The camp movement in filmmaking culminated in the creation of what Russo calls “[p]robably the ‘gayest’ film yet made by a major studio,”<sup>45</sup> *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.<sup>46</sup> This film mocked the high number of queer villains and the queer death toll in mainstream movies and created a sense of hope that this type of campy film might become a new mainstream genre.

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<sup>40</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> *The Boys in the Band*, directed by William Friedkin (USA: National General Pictures) 1970.

<sup>42</sup> *The Boys in the Band*, like many other LGBTQ+ films, was first a stage play.

<sup>43</sup> As seen in films like *American Gigolo*, directed by Paul Schrader (USA: Paramount Pictures) 1980.

<sup>44</sup> As seen in films like *Dressed to Kill*, directed by Brian de Palma (USA: Filmways Pictures) 1980.

<sup>45</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman (USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 1975.

Hollywood's most recent era – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hollywood (2000 – 2021) – has shown some progress in the depiction of LGBTQ+ characters as more complex and less stereotypical. However, as most mainstream Hollywood films still limit LGBTQ+ depictions to outdated stereotypes and tropes, there is much room for improvement.

In South Africa, the Apartheid government-controlled film content. This control started with state subsidies in 1956 and intensified in the 1960s and 1970s with the establishment of the Publications Control Board (PCB).<sup>47</sup> Afrikaner-Nationalist ideology denounced LGBTQ+ identities.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, filmmakers were forced to avoid portraying LGBTQ+ people or consent to displaying them in ways that would still pass under the radar of the various homophobic censors. South African filmmakers were given free rein to depict same-gender desiring (SGD) men, as long these characters were portrayed in villainising and degrading ways. These humiliating stereotypes about SGD men suited the Apartheid government's messaging on the ideal Afrikaner man.<sup>49</sup>

### 1.1.2 Literature Background

The study of queer representation is a relatively young practice. In 1981, Vito Russo, an American gay rights activist and film historian, published the book *The Celluloid Closet*.<sup>50</sup> The book is one of the first to investigate and document the representation of LGBTQ+ people in Hollywood films. The book's scope spans from the first films in Hollywood to the early 1980s – after Russo released an updated version in 1987. Russo captures the mentality of the American public toward LGBTQ+ representation when he discusses the process of writing the book. He notes that: “[a]lmost all people I spoke with reacted as though they had never considered a discussion of homosexuality as anything but potential gossip.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick O'Meara, “Review of *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, by K. Tomaselli,” *African Studies Review* 33, no. 1 (1990), 136.

<sup>48</sup> Ernst van der Wal, “Masculinities at War: The South African Border War and the Textual Representation of the ‘Moffie,’” *Journal of Literary Studies* 32, no. 2 (2019), 79.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Conway, “The Masculine State in Crisis: State Response to War Resistance in Apartheid South Africa,” *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 4. (2008): 422-429.

<sup>50</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*.

<sup>51</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, xi.



After Russo passed away from AIDS in 1990, Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman<sup>52</sup> made a documentary version of Russo's book. The documentary *The Celluloid Closet*<sup>53</sup> was released in 1995 and examined the representation of LGBTQ+ people in Hollywood up until then. The documentary also includes several interviews with LGBTQ+ actors and filmmakers and other actors who portrayed LGBTQ+ characters in films. These interviews reveal how starved LGBTQ+ viewers are for any representations.

From hearing this, one might be tempted to argue that although these Hollywood films are stereotypical in their depictions, they still represent LGBTQ+ people. However, considering the possible dangerous consequences that queer people might face due to the negative portrayals of LGBTQ+ people, it becomes clear that harmful film depictions can lead to damaging lived experiences. In his study of how gay protagonists are often forced into victim roles, Christopher Pullen finds that Hollywood's regressive depictions of LGBTQ+ characters are:

symptomatic not so much of a history of cinematic oppression of gay and lesbian identity, but are evidence of the wider social labelling of homosexuality as deviant, deeply established, and widely endured.<sup>54</sup>

Both the book and the documentary show that Hollywood LGBTQ+ characters have for the most part always been stereotypical caricatures and their stories tend to be limited to regressive tropes. My research builds on these two pivotal works and updates their exploration timeframe to 2021.

After Russo, Epstein and Friedman's contributions, Ruby Rich,<sup>55</sup> Harry M. Benshoff,<sup>56</sup> and Sean Griffin<sup>57</sup> have become the new academic leaders examining the representations of LGBTQ+ people in Hollywood films. Rich focuses on New Queer Cinema,<sup>58</sup> a movement in independent

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<sup>52</sup> Two filmmakers with a history of making films and documentaries about the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ people.

<sup>53</sup> *The Celluloid Closet*, directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman (USA: Sony Pictures Classics) 1995.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Pullen, "Heroic Gay Characters in Popular Film: Tragic Determination, and the Every Day," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 25, no. 3 (2011): 410

<sup>55</sup> American scholar and film critic.

<sup>56</sup> American professor of Radio, TV, and Film.

<sup>57</sup> American professor of Film and Media Arts

<sup>58</sup> Refers to the stylistically specific queer-themed independent film movement which started in the 1990s. Rich, *New Queer Cinema*, xv.

queer-themed filmmaking, and is, therefore, not explicitly concerned with mainstream Hollywood. Benshoff and Griffin offer thorough overviews of Hollywood films and LGBTQ+ depictions but never classify the relevant stereotypes and tropes. Therefore, this dissertation provides the first comprehensive exploration of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in mainstream Hollywood films.

In South Africa, the study of LGBTQ+ representation is even younger. South African cinema, as a dual cinema,<sup>59</sup> also requires more complex analyses. The leading academics in Afrikaans cinema's representation of LGBTQ+ people are Martin Botha<sup>60</sup> and Theo Sonnekus.<sup>61</sup> Both have examined the impact that Apartheid had on historical and contemporary LGBTQ+ depictions and social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. As both are still active in the fields of film theory and queer theory, this dissertation merely engages with their discussions and adds to the growing body of literature.

The rest of South African cinema (English and Vernacular cinema) has very few images of LGBTQ+ people. Therefore, the field is still in its formative years. While there are many relevant queer theorists in this field, this dissertation considers Thabo Msibi<sup>62</sup> and Martin Botha (again) the most relevant authors. Msibi offers an in-depth view of how African media contributes to homophobic social attitudes in various African countries. On the other hand, Botha explores the development of the different South African cinemas as well as LGBTQ+ representations in all South African cinemas.

## 1.2 Research Problem and Methodology

Despite a quantitative increase in LGBTQ+ representations in Hollywood and South African films, the narratives still follow heteronormative film structures that perpetuate LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. For this reason, I conduct a qualitative analysis of LGBTQ+ film representations. My research methodology is situated in the textual analysis paradigm.<sup>63</sup> The texts analysed in this

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<sup>59</sup> South Africa's film industry is divided along racial lines due to disproportionate government funding during Apartheid. This dual cinema is discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> South African professor in Film and Media Studies.

<sup>61</sup> South African Visual Arts scholar.

<sup>62</sup> South African professor and scholar in sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender.

<sup>63</sup> Textual analysis refers to a range of primarily qualitative methodologies that study meanings of a text's content.

dissertation are films produced in the US and South Africa that include depictions of LGBTQ+ characters. I conduct a qualitative<sup>64</sup> semiotic<sup>65</sup> and content<sup>66</sup> analysis to assess how the selected film depictions contribute to the construction and reinforcement of damaging ideologies and myths.<sup>67</sup>

Adopting a qualitative research approach means that my discussions are interpretative, and my conclusions are subjective. As stated, LGBTQ+ individuals disagree on what “good enough” or “acceptable” representation is; academics are even more divided. Therefore, I have developed simplified criteria for what I will consider fair LGBTQ+ representation. Firstly, a film must not play into anti-LGBTQ+ myths. Thereafter, the film’s LGBTQ+ character(s) must:

1. Be explicitly queer. Unlike Code-Era characters, the viewer must not be able to read them as heteronormative.
2. Not conform to most stereotypes or tropes. Some real LGBTQ+ people and stories conform to film stereotypes or tropes; therefore, their inclusion may sometimes be acceptable. However, this must be judged on an individual basis as it depends on how the specific film employs these stereotypes or tropes.
3. Be a complex character that experiences growth. A two-dimensional character is a caricature and is not reasonably able to imitate a real person.
4. Not be the token character. LGBTQ+ people tend to be friends with other LGBTQ+ people. Including one LGBTQ+ character in an otherwise heteronormative film is most likely nothing more than queerbaiting.<sup>68</sup> However, exceptions are possible but are unlikely, and if they arise, they must be acknowledged.

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<sup>64</sup> Instead of measuring the state of LGBTQ+ film representation in SA and Hollywood by counting how many queer films these industries produce, I analyse how meaningfully these depictions represent LGBTQ+ people.

<sup>65</sup> The study of signs (depictions) and their meanings with regard to the social world.

<sup>66</sup> The study of recurring themes and motifs in a set of texts. In this dissertation, I specifically investigate the recurrence of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

<sup>67</sup> Lisa M. Given, “Textual Analysis,” *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (2012): 865-866.

<sup>68</sup> Queerbaiting is the practice of luring LGBTQ+ people into watching a film by advertising the film as depicting LGBTQ+ relationships, despite the film itself being void of any meaningful representation. Joseph Brennan, “Queerbaiting: The ‘Playful’ Possibilities of Homoeroticism,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2018): 189-206.

5. Not be the embodiment of the Other. Filmmakers cannot place all Othering<sup>69</sup> qualities on one character and call it inclusion or representation. Yes, queer people of colour with disabilities exist, but it is highly doubtful that they only surround themselves with white, heteronormative, and able-bodied people.

To examine this, I conduct qualitative textual analyses and apply semiotic analysis to determine what the representations identified in the texts mean.

### 1.3 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

To focus the scope of this dissertation, I establish the aims, objectives, and questions of this research. First, my dissertation aims to:

1. provide a comprehensive exploration of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes, and
2. examine how these are reproduced in South African films.

Second, to achieve these aims, my research objectives are to:

1. identify Hollywood films' most prevalent LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes,
2. categorise them according to common themes, then to
3. explore if and how these specific stereotypes and tropes reappear in South African films, and
4. to assess whether South Africa's queer-films also reproduce them.

Third, my research questions are as follow:

1. Why does it matter how LGBTQ+ people are depicted in mainstream films?
2. What types of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes are prominent in Hollywood films?
3. Which of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes are prevalent in South African movies?

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<sup>69</sup> Such as being part of one or more socially disenfranchised groups.

4. Do South Africa's queer films conform to or subvert these identified stereotypes and tropes?

## 1.4 Significance of Study

As stated, this dissertation includes the first comprehensive taxonomy of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in Hollywood films. Currently, there is no category for the vast amount of depressed and lonely LGBTQ+ character depictions in academia. Instead, depressed and miserable LGBTQ+ characters are included under Bury Your Gays discussions, even if the characters do not die. Furthermore, lonely characters have their own semi-category – “no happy ending for same-sex relationships”<sup>70</sup> – that exists mainly in informal discussions.

Similarly, despite how different the types of gay and lesbian stereotypes are, most discussions include them under single terms like “sissy” and “tomboy.”<sup>71</sup> Other discourses divide the different kinds of gay or lesbian stereotypes into too many obscure subtypes, like the lesbian stereotypes: “career-oriented feminist,” “soft butch,” “angry butch,” “free spirit,” “lipstick lesbian,” “hypersexual,” “sexually confused,” etc.<sup>72</sup> I distinguish between the different gay and lesbian stereotypes and sort them into three categories, respectively.

Furthermore, this dissertation is the first to explore how the combination of Hollywood's influence and Apartheid-era propaganda shaped the current South African film industry's depictions of LGBTQ+ characters. Finally, this research does not only offer an analysis of the selected South African queer films, but it also seeks to determine whether any of these films succeed in offering fair<sup>73</sup> LGBTQ+ representations.

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<sup>70</sup> Cajsa Löf, “Love is Ours only in Death: An Analysis of how Lesbian and Bisexual Relationships are Stereotyped on Western Television Shows through the use of Tropes,” (Bachelor's Thesis, University West. 2016): 24.

<sup>71</sup> As seen in Russo's work.

<sup>72</sup> Wendy Geiger and Mary Lee Hummert, “College Students' Multiple Stereotypes of Lesbians: A Cognitive Perspective,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 151, no. 3 (2006): 171-175.

<sup>73</sup> As determined by my five criteria.

## 1.5 Research Limitations

As the scope is limited to Hollywood and South African films, many influential LGBTQ+ films, like *Pride*,<sup>74</sup> *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*,<sup>75</sup> and *La Vie d'Adèle*,<sup>76</sup> cannot be discussed in my dissertation. The second research limitation is the lack of transgender representation. As most LGBTQ+ depictions are concerned with sexualities, I cannot provide an extensive exploration of trans-representation. Furthermore, South African films are void of transgender characters, which renders examining how Hollywood's transgender stereotypes influence South African filmmakers impossible. While I discuss some Hollywood films that include transgender depictions, there is a definite need for further research.

Finally, I cannot include all the South African films that depict LGBTQ+ characters, as some films are simply inaccessible. I almost had to limit my discussion on *Moffie*<sup>77</sup> as the film was unavailable in South Africa from mid-2020 to late-2021. Before its most recent availability, I could only view *Moffie* once, which made it impossible for me to offer an extensive discussion on the film – as neither my supervisor nor I could determine who had shot themselves after just one viewing.<sup>78</sup> In short, the greatest obstacle and limitation that this research faces is South Africa's film distribution industry.

## 1.6 Structure Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Each chapter starts with a quote that captures the main topic of that chapter. The first three chapters serve to inform the primary discussion which occurs in Chapter 4. The five chapters are laid out and titled as follows:

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<sup>74</sup> *Pride*, directed by Matthew Warchus (United Kingdom: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 2014.

<sup>75</sup> *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, directed by Stephan Elliot (Australia: Roadshow Entertainment) 1994.

<sup>76</sup> *La Vie d'Adèle (Blue is the Warmest Colour)*, directed by Abdellatif Kechiche (France: Wild Bunch) 2013.

<sup>77</sup> One of my primary films. *Moffie (Faggot)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus (SA: Portobello Productions) 2019.

<sup>78</sup> The identity of this character determined whether or not the film conformed to an LGBTQ+ trope.

Chapter 1: Introduction – On Representation. The current chapter details this research's background and modus operandi and offers an overview of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and Literature review – Representation, Identity, and the Media. In this chapter, I engage with several different fields such as psychology, queer theory, feminism, and film theory. Central to this chapter are the concept of representation, its psychological impact on identity formation, and the process of shaping viewers' expectations of LGBTQ+ people.

Chapter 3: Hollywood's LGBTQ+ Stereotypes and Tropes. I examine Hollywood's history and discuss the origins of the LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. Thereafter, I discuss the five stereotype and trope categories, namely: Men-desiring men stereotypes (the Pansy, the Sissy, and the Queen), Women-desiring women stereotypes (the Dyke, the Tomboy, and Lesbian-Chic), Queer Villains (Queer-Coded Villains, Queer Predators, and Queer Killers), Pity Your Gays (No-Happy-Endings, Misery, and Victimhood), and Bury Your Gays (Suicide, Purge, and AIDS). Given that this is the first comprehensive list of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes, I had to name some of them myself. These include the Queen (there have been references made to hysterical gays, but those discussions ignore the Queen's confidence), Queer Predators and Queer Killers (Queer Villains is a common topic, but most discussions do not distinguish between villains who are Queer-Coded to make them interesting and villains whose queerness is portrayed as an inherently wicked quality), and Pity Your Gays (named after Bury Your Gays – as the trope's other half).

Chapter 4: Hollywood Reproduced in South African Films. I examine the origins and developments of South Africa's two cinemas: Afrikaans cinema and English-and Vernacular cinema. Thereafter, I explore how South African films copy Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. I discuss these according to the same five categories laid out in Chapter 3. As part of these discussions, I analyse my primary films, which are

five selected South African queer films released in the last decade, namely: *Skoonheid*,<sup>79</sup> *Kanarie*,<sup>80</sup> *Rafiki*,<sup>81</sup> and *Moffie*.<sup>82</sup>

Chapter 5: Conclusion. I summarise my findings from Chapters 2 – 4, set out to answer my research questions, and, lastly, identify potential avenues for future research.

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<sup>79</sup> *Skoonheid (Beauty)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus (SA: Swift Productions) 2011.

<sup>80</sup> *Kanarie (Canary)*, directed by Christiaan Olwagen (SA: Marche Media) 2018.

<sup>81</sup> *Rafiki (Friend)*, directed by Wanuri Kahiu (Kenya: Big World Cinema) 2018.

<sup>82</sup> *Moffie*, 2019.



# Chapter 2:

## Representation, Identity, and the Media

The articulation of sexuality is neither natural nor inevitable; it is shaped and determined by a given society within a particular historical moment.<sup>83</sup>

Film theorists observe that the “[i]mages of people on film actively contribute to how people are understood and experienced in the real world.”<sup>84</sup> In short, representation shapes expectation. This chapter offers an overview of the existing literature that explores how media representations affect people’s perceptions of each other and themselves: why representation matters. This overview of why representation matters explains how heteronormative patriarchal ideology functions to exclude and distort queer identities, and the role that films play in distributing these ideologies.

This chapter sets out to explore three themes that are crucial to understanding why representation matters. The first is the formation of identity – how people view themselves and others. The second is the construction of meaning – how people interpret and experience the world. The third is the role that media plays in distributing meanings and perpetuating existing power structures. Film is influential and is, therefore, a powerful reinforcement tool for dominant ideologies.

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<sup>83</sup> Edith Becker et al., “Lesbians and Film” in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>84</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 3.

## 2.1 Identity formation

Representation finds significance in its role in shaping identity. The school of psychoanalysis explores how the human psyche works and, by extension, how people understand themselves and each other. Psychoanalysis is useful for this analysis as it offers different insights into how identity is formed. Sigmund Freud – Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis – argues for the theory of personal identity wherein one’s identity is created from within.<sup>85</sup> Jacques Lacan – French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist – disagrees. Lacan argues for the view of cultural identity wherein one’s identity is shaped by one’s surroundings.<sup>86</sup> Franz Fanon – French West-Indian psychiatrist and political philosopher – agrees with Lacan and builds on this argument by introducing the power of media. According to Fanon, media has a pronounced impact on personal identity formation.

Additionally, this identity formation process may be confounded by external influences and factors originating outside one’s own culture.<sup>87</sup> This is why representation is important. Given that external forces and media images shape identities, how a person’s group is depicted and represented directly influences their identity.

Early psychoanalytic theory regards identity formation as a social act. Freud defines identification as “the earliest expression of an emotional tie to another person”<sup>88</sup> and divides the psyche into three parts: the ego, the id and the super-ego. The ego (conscious identity) is one’s “coherent organisation of mental processes.”<sup>89</sup> The id (primitive subconscious) is the unrestrained instinctual

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<sup>85</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Identity”, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959): 37-42; Sigmund Freud, “Consciousness and what is Unconscious”, in *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: W. W. Horton & Company, 1960): 3-10; Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id”, in *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: W. W. Horton & Company, 1960), 11-21; Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego Ideal)”, in *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: W. W. Horton & Company, 1960): 22-36.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I*”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004): 441-446.

<sup>87</sup> Franz Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004): 462-468.

<sup>88</sup> Freud, “Identity”, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Freud, “Consciousness and what is Unconscious”, 8.

part of the psyche, which is only concerned with maximising pleasure.<sup>90</sup> The super-ego or the “ego ideal”<sup>91</sup> (moral subconscious) is the most virtuous part of the psyche. It is responsible for suppressing the id and serves as the internal moral compass.<sup>92</sup>

Freud identifies the ego as central to the identity formation process. According to Freud, the ego consumes information from the external world, evaluates this information against internal desires (the id) and ideals (the super-ego), and absorbs what it deems appropriate – thereby developing and growing. Simultaneously, the ego also represses unwanted thoughts and censors the subconscious (the id and the super-ego) before presenting internal ideas to the external world. In other words, the ego filters external ideas through internal beliefs.<sup>93</sup> Freud promotes this identity formation process as being conscious and controlled by the ego.

Lacan disagrees with Freud and argues that the ego has no control over the identity formation process. Lacan postulates that there is direct communication between the subconscious (id and super-ego) and external influences; thereby, the ego is bypassed. Instead of controlling the dialogue between the id, the super-ego and the external world, the ego is shaped and influenced by them. Therefore, the ego has little to no control over identity formation. Instead, identity is given to us by a series of mirror-images.<sup>94</sup>

Lacan states that we “are shaped by the Symbolic order into which we are born, an order that determines our gender identity and our place in our families.”<sup>95</sup> This Symbolic order refers to unspoken social norms and expectations. Before individuals begin to form their own identity, those around them already start projecting identity expectations upon them. Considering these definitions and Lacan’s quote, Lacan implies that gender is a social construct – determined by nurture and not nature. This idea is crucial to identity and representation theory and is further explored throughout this dissertation.

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<sup>90</sup> Freud, “The Ego and the Id”, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Freud, “The Ego and Super-Ego”, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Freud, “The Ego and Super-Ego,” 22.

<sup>93</sup> Freud, “Consciousness and Unconscious”, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” 441-446.

<sup>95</sup> Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” 441.

Lacan continues that “the human child, at an age when he [or she or they] is for a short while [...] outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can already recognise his [or her or their] own image as such in a mirror.”<sup>96</sup> Lacan refers to this developmental stage as the “mirror stage.”<sup>97</sup> In this stage, a child learns to recognise their image in a mirror and acknowledge that it represents who they are – accurately or not. By building on and critiquing Freud, Lacan identifies the psychological-level justification for the importance of representation. From the moment a child can recognise their image (physical features) in a mirror, they can also recognise images that resemble them (which contain similar physical features) in a book or a film. After identifying the resemblance, this child learns to identify with these images as a social act. Therefore, these external images fundamentally influence – and help shape – the child’s identity.

Fanon builds on this seminal work of Lacan by exploring how representation impacts children during the mirror stage. Fanon argues that a “normal child that has grown up in a normal family will be a normal [person].”<sup>98</sup> This raises the question of the exact definition of “normal”. Additionally, it problematises normative cultural prepositions surrounding supposed normality and the exclusions or Othering of those who do not conform to these ideals.

In a world where whiteness is portrayed as the norm in media, Fanon explains that the Algerian child (his example) will identify with the white protagonists in western media. By identifying as white, this child learns to define the world according to white normativity.<sup>99</sup> This means that the child mimics other white-associated behaviours, like looking down on his Algerian peers, whom the child sees as black. This act is a form of Othering – the western media taught the child to view black identity as inferior to white identity. Later, when confronted with whiteness in the real world, the child realises that they are, in fact, black. This leads the child to equate themselves with all the negative myths they have come to believe about black characters, and these beliefs ultimately lead

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<sup>96</sup> Lacan, “The Mirror Stage”, 441.

<sup>97</sup> Lacan, “The Mirror Stage.”

<sup>98</sup> Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology,” 462.

<sup>99</sup> Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology,” 465.

to self-hatred and rejection.<sup>100</sup> This is how Fanon illustrates the detrimental impact of degrading media representations.

Fanon's argument applies to all groups that do not conform to the dominant idea of the norm – specific to this dissertation that includes members of the LGBTQ+ community. An LGBTQ+ child who grows up with media portraying heterosexuality as the norm – or worse, LGBTQ+ identities as deviant – may come to internalise homophobic beliefs and dissociate from their identity. This process causes the child to either reject their own sexuality or gender identity or risk being rejected by their society. Ultimately, media significantly influence the identity formation process, as it can frame some identities as more important than others.

### 2.1.1 Identity Power Structures

This inequality of identities is known as hegemony. Hegemony, as defined by Antonio Gramsci – Italian Marxist philosopher and politician – refers to the social power structures into which a society is organised.<sup>101</sup> Hegemonic power structures are socially constructed but are presented as being inevitable or naturally occurring. Gramsci argues that, “power can be maintained without force if [...] consent [...] can be obtained through education and through other kinds of cultural labor.”<sup>102</sup> In other words, the dominant class uses education, mass media, etc., to forge “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the direction imprinted on social life by the fundamental ruling class.”<sup>103</sup> Media is a tool that can coerce these “great masses” to submit to the hegemonic power structures designed by the dominant class.<sup>104</sup>

Building on Gramsci, Louis Althusser – French Marxist philosopher – explains that the maintenance of a dominant ideology (specific meanings or messaging that benefit the dominant

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<sup>100</sup> Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology”, 465.

<sup>101</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “On Hegemony and Direct Rule,” in *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. Alexander Lyon Macfie, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 39-40.

<sup>102</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “Hegemony”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 673.

<sup>103</sup> Gramsci, “On Hegemony and Direct Rule,” 40.

<sup>104</sup> Gramsci, “On Hegemony and Direct Rule”, 40.

class) relies on the constant education of the masses in said ideology.<sup>105</sup> Education through educational, religious, and media systems teaches knowledge in ways that “ensure subjection to the ruling ideology.”<sup>106</sup> In this way, ideology becomes a mode of reproduction, a way to reinforce a status quo. Althusser explains that this requires coercing people into subjecting themselves to said status quo.<sup>107</sup>

By following Fanon’s practice of applying Hegemony Theory to Lacan’s mirror-stage concept, one can argue that a medium, like film, is a discourse that informs and enforces social standings.<sup>108</sup> Films become mirrors that offer viewers images of their hegemonic rankings in the world and coerce them to accept a preselected social position by painting it as predestined. People’s personal identities and social identities are shaped through media. This highlights the inherent problem of stereotypes and false or discriminative representations. By defining some character types as “normal” or “correct” and situating others as “strange” or “deviant,” media contributes to the oppressive practice called “Othering.”

### 2.1.2 Othering

Othering, as coined by Edmund Husserl – a German philosopher and the founder of the school of phenomenology<sup>109</sup> – is the act of mentally characterising those with identities that differ fundamentally from the dominant ego (identity or even ideology) as being nothing more than “world Objects.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, the Other operates in opposition to the self (dominant ego). Husserl explains that:

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<sup>105</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation.” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 85-125.

<sup>106</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and the State,” 89.

<sup>107</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and the State,” 113.

<sup>108</sup> Erin B. Waggoner, “Bury Your Gays and Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation, and Communication Ethics”, *Journal of Homosexuality* 65, no. 13 (2018), 1877-1891.

<sup>109</sup> Phenomenology is the reflective study of how we understand the world through our subjective experience of it.

<sup>110</sup> Husserl, “Fifth Meditation”, 90-91.

The ‘Other’, according to his own constituted sense, points to me myself; the other is a ‘mirroring’ of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense.<sup>111</sup>

In operationalising Husserl’s quote and placing it in the context of Lacan’s explanation of the mirror, it becomes clear that the Other is framed as a distorted, or incorrect, self. In defining the dominant ego, Husserl first notes that “it is *non-alien*.”<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the Other *is* alien. Husserl continues that, “it is necessary to survey this world and pay attention to how something alien makes its appearance.”<sup>113</sup> This is how Othering is an act, an ongoing social practice.

As explained by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak – Indian literary theorist and feminist critic – Othering is concerned with power.<sup>114</sup> The empowered naively see the sets of identities they ascribe to as the norm and identities belonging to those deemed less important, as Other. Othering is a form of oppression that classifies a group by its differences from the dominant group.<sup>115</sup> In other words, Othering defines someone by what they are not and, therefore, serves to delegitimise the person’s identity. In order to uphold hegemony and protect the myth of normality, the Other is oppressed.

The act of Othering is first and foremost achieved through selective language. By naming ourselves “us” and the rest “them,” we designate ourselves as the primary identities and others as secondary identities, which exist solely in relation to us. By constructing meanings, language creates cultures and normalises hierarchies.

Sune Qvotrup Jensen – Danish sociologist – explores how Othering is weaponised against disenfranchised groups. Jensen notes that the specific qualities that differentiate the Other’s identities from the norm are “pathologized”<sup>116</sup> by the media. The quality of a group’s media representation dramatically depends on that group’s relative standing in a society’s hegemonic

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<sup>111</sup> Husserl, “Fifth Meditation”, 94.

<sup>112</sup> Husserl, “Fifth Meditation”, 95.

<sup>113</sup> Husserl, “Fifth Meditation”, 95.

<sup>114</sup> Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur.”

<sup>115</sup> Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur.”

<sup>116</sup> Sune Qvotrup Jensen, “Othering, Identity Formation and Agency,” *Qualitative Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 63.

structure. With heteronormativity being the dominant ideology, it operates by Othering LGBTQ+ identities, limiting them to non-heteronormative classification. For example, by naming all sexual orientations that differ from heterosexuality as “non-straight,” language subjects these sexual orientations to heterosexual hegemonic structures.

## 2.2 Construction of Meaning

Just as media supports hegemony by coercing viewers to accept their social standing unquestioningly, it also encodes social messaging. This process creates a supplier-consumer relationship. Media supplies norms, expectations, ideologies and hegemony, and viewers, in turn, consume these messages and adjust their behaviours, appearances, and worldviews accordingly. In her book *When the Moon Waxes Red*,<sup>117</sup> Thi Minh-ha Trinh – Vietnamese filmmaker – explains that cinema is the “ideal medium for social indoctrination and comment” whose virtues lay in its capacity to select from real life what to re-present to the receptive viewer.<sup>118</sup> Trinh continues that, “cinema is often reified into a corpus of traditions [... and] what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than *a* meaning.” What happens between a possible meaning being just *a* meaning, and becoming *the truth* is “the interval.”<sup>119</sup> In the context of this paper, the interval is the space wherein an intended interpretation is woven into a text as a way to persuade the consumer to accept a specific meaning as the only meaning.

Benshoff and Griffin classify what happens in this interval as the practice of encoding and decoding. They state that “[t]here are two stages of making meaning within any given text: encoding and decoding.”<sup>120</sup> Encoding occurs during production. The filmmakers (suppliers of meaning) encode – intentionally or not – ideologies and meanings into films. Viewers (consumers of meaning), in turn, decode these ideologies and meanings while watching the films. Filmmakers, films, and viewers “make up a system of communication or meaning production, and that system

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<sup>117</sup> Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red*.

<sup>118</sup> Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 29-30.

<sup>120</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 15-16.



exists within the larger social spheres of culture and ideology.”<sup>121</sup> In other words, some level of shared ideology or culture is fundamental to this process.

John Fiske – American media scholar – analyses how meanings are encoded into television programmes and how these encodings signal to viewers how they should react to certain characters.<sup>122</sup> Fiske explains that scenes can have a variety of meanings but that creators train their viewers to focus on specific meanings, through repetitive encoding, and how to react.<sup>123</sup> Stereotypes and tropes are such repetitive encodings. These generic codes and conventions are central to ensuring that producers and consumers share a language through which to understand what is being communicated onscreen. Upon seeing a man, for example, dress or act effeminately, the viewer may already start laughing in anticipation of what the comic relief gay-caricature might do. Similarly, after repetitively seeing onscreen queer couples separating, the viewer may feel reluctant to identify with these couples in an attempt to avoid inevitable tragedy in their own lives.

## 2.3 The Distributed Meanings and Ideologies.

Through the process of constructing and distributing meaning, and by perpetuating existing power structures, mainstream films – knowingly or otherwise – protect and promote dominant heteronormative ideologies. These ideologies oppress LGBTQ+ people, and I identify the most prevalent ones as: the heterosexual matrix, patriarchy, and heteronormative hegemony. The heterosexual matrix encapsulates the assumption that sex, gender, and sexual orientation are linked. Patriarchy, on the other hand, is the hegemonic system that elevates men above women. Lastly, heteronormative hegemony advocates that LGBTQ+ people are socially worth less than heteronormative people.

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<sup>121</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 16.

<sup>122</sup> John Fiske, “Television Culture,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 1274-1284.

<sup>123</sup> Fiske, “Television Culture.”

### 2.3.1 The Heterosexual Matrix

American gender theorist, Judith Butler, coined the term “heterosexual matrix”<sup>124</sup> to describe existing heteronormative social assumptions. This matrix is a system that posits an intrinsic link between one’s “sex, gender, and desire.”<sup>125</sup> It frames gender and desire along very strict binaries,<sup>126</sup> assumes that sex dictates gender,<sup>127</sup> and suggests that “desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire.”<sup>128</sup>

Butler disagrees with this line of thinking and argues that “gender is culturally constructed [... and] is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex.”<sup>129</sup> She continues that, under the heterosexual matrix, the body becomes “a passive medium upon which cultural meanings are inscribed.”<sup>130</sup> In short, Butler contends that there is no inherent or natural link between one’s sex and gender. Furthermore, Butler argues that gender is socially constructed, and how different genders are defined changes between cultures and over time.<sup>131</sup> Lastly, Butler concludes that gender is a verb. She explains that:

Gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.<sup>132</sup>

Gender is not an identity but a continuous performance, informed by historical assumptions. Butler’s work is key to queer theory as she challenges the existence of normative genders and sexualities. Her work is a rebuttal to hegemonic ideologies, like patriarchy, that seek to structure society along the axis of the heterosexual matrix.

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<sup>124</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), xxx.

<sup>125</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31.

<sup>126</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxx.

<sup>127</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.

<sup>128</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31.

<sup>129</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8.

<sup>130</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.

<sup>131</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

<sup>132</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

### 2.3.2 Patriarchy

Benshoff and Griffin argue that “homophobia and heterosexism are deeply connected to the patriarchal culture in which we live.”<sup>133</sup> They investigate how homophobia is used to oppress women and protect patriarchy. In essence: patriarchy depends upon the universal acceptance of gender roles, and promotes different fallacies connected to these roles. Fallacies such as: men are providers and women are caregivers, men are strong – so they must hunt – and women are weak – so they must cook – and, lastly, that men are more intelligent – and, therefore, are more vital to make decisions for the household – while women suffer from “obsessional neurosis”<sup>134</sup> – and, therefore, cannot be trusted.

Same-gender relationships – especially same-gender marriages – contradict these ideas. Their existence implies that men and women can fulfil either role – of providers or caregivers – in society. Equal rights for LGBTQ+ people give these truths legitimacy and are, therefore, an admission that gender roles are interchangeable. Consequently, patriarchy is dependent on, and benefits from, homophobia.

Psychoanalysis has been weaponised against women and LGBTQ+ people to protect patriarchy. Freud promotes the heterosexual matrix as fact and posits that the genders are inherently unequal. In one of his essays on sexuality, “The Transformations of Puberty,”<sup>135</sup> Freud explores how the two sexes are assigned with “very different functions” in achieving “the new sexual aim”<sup>136</sup> that comes with puberty. He describes the sexual development of males during puberty as “more straightforward and the more understandable, while that of females enters upon a kind of involution.”<sup>137</sup> Considering that “involution” refers to the shrinkage of an organ, Freud argues that a woman is a castrated man. By viewing the development of the sexes as oppositional occurrences,

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<sup>133</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 296.

<sup>134</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Clinical Picture,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays in Sexuality and Other Works*, translated by James Strachey, 20. London: The Hogarth Press, 1953.

<sup>135</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Transformations of Puberty”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays in Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 207-230.

<sup>136</sup> Freud, “The Transformation of Puberty,” 207.

<sup>137</sup> Freud, “The Transformations of Puberty”, 207.

Freud categorises the male sex as logical and developed, and the female sex as illogical and undeveloped.

Through his linkage of gender and sex, Freud concludes that women are fundamentally inferior to men. By extension, a man who takes on any woman-related gender behaviours is also inferior to other men. Such a man is seen as castrated due to an apparent failure that occurred during puberty, which caused him to go through an “involution” like women, instead of an evolution, like men. Freud assumes a law-like correlation between sex and gender – that gender develops during puberty according to a predetermined formula assigned by sex. His beliefs – although focussed on supporting patriarchal ideologies – also inform homophobic myths. These homophobic myths, along with patriarchy, serve to order society according to heteronormative hegemonic structures.

### 2.3.3 Heteronormative Hegemony

Gayle Rubin – an American cultural anthropologist, activist, and gender and sex politics theorist – discusses a phenomenon she names the “sex/gender system”<sup>138</sup> (another name for the heterosexual matrix) as the cause of the oppression of women and sexual minorities. She defines the “sex/gender system” as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.”<sup>139</sup> This comes as a response to patriarchal assumptions, like the notion that sex and gender are intrinsically linked. Rubin credits such assumptions as being at the core of gender and sexual inequalities. She explores all possible careers designated to men and problematises the historical belief that a “wife” is a full-time job in society. This assumption limits women to a singular occupation – one restricted to domestic chores in the service of men.<sup>140</sup> Rubin opposes the “sex/gender system” by highlighting the malicious intentions and outcomes of the system. Films are used to promote these systems.

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<sup>138</sup> The “sex/gender-system” is more commonly called “patriarchy.”

<sup>139</sup> Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004): 771.

<sup>140</sup> Rubin, “The Traffic in Women”, 773.

In her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,”<sup>141</sup> Laura Mulvey – renowned feminist film theorist – explores how the act of viewing is voyeuristic and scopophilic. She defines voyeurism as a sense of pleasure and empowerment derived from looking at someone without their knowledge or consent, and scopophilia as “pleasure in looking.”<sup>142</sup> The viewer objectifies the viewed and often derives sexual pleasure from this unwelcomed gaze.<sup>143</sup> Films manage to present their stories and characters as private worlds being spied upon by viewers, producing “a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy.”<sup>144</sup> Characters on screen can easily be objectified for egoist or fetishist reasons, or both. When a character who already represents someone over whom the viewer feels empowered, is portrayed in a voyeuristic manner, the sense of separation that Mulvey notes, is doubled, and the character is further objectified.

Films do this through what Mulvey calls, “the male gaze.”<sup>145</sup> The male gaze intensifies the objectification of women by forcing the (active) male’s point of view upon the (passive) female’s body. Films stylise female characters to evoke sexual fantasies and encourage fetishization.<sup>146</sup> Similarly, the “white gaze,”<sup>147</sup> as referred to by George Yancy – American philosopher – operates like the male gaze but with a different goal. The male gaze reflects male filmmakers’ views of women as sexual objects and further objectifies them on screen. The white gaze reflects white filmmakers’ views of other races as inferior, uncultured, and criminal and serves to further Other and oppress them.

Similarly, heteronormative films depict LGBTQ+ people through what I call the straight gaze. The straight gaze serves to keep LGBTQ+ characters “defined solely by [their] sexuality,”<sup>148</sup> which ultimately dehumanises and Others them. In this way, voyeuristic filmmaking disempowers and

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<sup>141</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Visual and Other Pleasures: Language, Discourse, Society*, (Hampshire, The Macmillan Press, 1989): 14-26.

<sup>142</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 16.

<sup>143</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure Narrative and Cinema,” 16-17

<sup>144</sup> Mulvey “Visual Pleasure Narrative and Cinema”, 17.

<sup>145</sup> Mulvey “Visual Pleasure Narrative and Cinema,” 19.

<sup>146</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, 19

<sup>147</sup> George Yancy, “Walking While Black in the ‘White Gaze,’” *The New York Times*, September 1, 2013, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/walking-while-black-in-the-white-gaze/>.

<sup>148</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, xii.

objectifies women, people of colour, and the LGBTQ+ community, through the male, white and straight gaze, respectively.

Hollywood films overwhelmingly cater to white heteronormative viewers. Hollywood functions “under the dominant ideology of white patriarchal capitalism”<sup>149</sup> and is greatly shaped by conservatism due to the long-lasting influences of the Production Code. At the core of the Hollywood film form hides homophobic ideologies. One cannot hope to tell positive and complex LGBTQ+ stories in a format ultimately designed to exclude them. South Africa’s film industry also exhibits internalised homophobia – as seen in the adoption of Hollywood’s LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. In order to make films that do not conform to heteronormative ideals, filmmakers need to adopt new film structures to break away from Hollywood’s standard model.

Raquel Gates – American professor of cinema and media studies – explores how the creators of *Moonlight*<sup>150</sup> managed to make a film free from these white-centric filmmaking restraints. *Moonlight* is a seminal film that offers a realistic depiction of life as a lower-class African American and life as a queer man in this culture. Gates explains that film cinematography and lighting have been designed to highlight and complement white skins. When dark skins are placed in this lighting and set design, the camera fails to capture the features and nuances of the actors’ expressions. With this, she states that filmmakers should recognise that “aesthetic choices carry racialized politics” and realise that filmmaking is ultimately a political art.<sup>151</sup>

The creators of *Moonlight* rejected the outdated filming techniques that focused only on white skins and instead stylised the visual aspects of the film to complement the black actors’ skins. By rejecting “white-gaze” filmmaking, the creators produced a beautiful African American queer film and won the Oscar for the best feature film of 2016. This shows that problematic systems and practices in the film industry limit the quality of films produced. More importantly, when filmmakers reject these systems and practices, the quality of the films improves.

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<sup>149</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 75.

<sup>150</sup> *Moonlight*, directed by Barry Jenkins (USA: A24) 2016.

<sup>151</sup> Raquel Gates, “The Last shall be First: Aesthetics and Politics in Black Film and Media,” *Film Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2017): 40

## 2.4 Conclusion

The film medium plays three critical roles in the story of why representation matters. Films influence the formation of identities and the construction of meanings; they reproduce and distribute specific ideas surrounding identities and meanings to viewers, and they uphold and protect dominant ideologies and classes. Vested interest groups therefore continue to exploit the film medium in order to maintain influence in society.

Inadvertently, Hollywood national propaganda films have reached and influenced international audiences. Hollywood films have shaped more than just the American public's understandings and expectations of LGBTQ+ people. Hollywood has created damaging myths about various people by employing stereotypes and tropes and limiting LGBTQ+ characters and stories to these stereotypes and tropes. Furthermore, as South African films have adopted these stereotypes and tropes, Hollywood films directly influence how South Africans view LGBTQ+ people.

# Chapter 3:

## Hollywood's LGBTQ+

### Stereotypes and Tropes

Hollywood, that great maker of myths, taught straight people what to think about gay people.<sup>152</sup>

When depicting LGBTQ+ characters, Hollywood films tend to rely on outdated stereotypes and tropes.<sup>153</sup> Mainstream films present gender along a very limiting dichotomy. In this way, Hollywood films reinforce and perpetuate the myth of the conflation of gender, sex, and sexual orientation. Over the years, Hollywood filmmakers have established stereotypical characters and story tropes to represent LGBTQ+ characters. Most often, their films tend to use “a single stereotypically queer character as the butt of homophobic jokes”<sup>154</sup> or limit the stories of queer characters to predetermined tropes. Chapter 4 discusses how South African films have come to mimic Hollywood films in this regard.

This chapter explores LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in Hollywood films. It serves to inform this dissertation's main discussion on how these stereotypes and tropes are replicated in South African films. As the basis of this chapter, I briefly discuss how stereotypes and tropes operate, and why they are problematic tools in films. Thereafter, the main section of this chapter offers an in-depth exploration of the LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes found in both Hollywood and South African films, with illustrative examples from Hollywood films.

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<sup>152</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 1995.

<sup>153</sup> Michael Green, “Screenwriting Representation: Teaching Approaches to Writing Queer Characters”, *Journal of Film and Video* 65, no. 1-2 (2013), 31.

<sup>154</sup> Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Images*, 9.



LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in Hollywood have been perfected and are instantly recognisable. Stereotypes are generalised and regressive depictions of specific groups of people.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, tropes are simplified and repetitive occurrences applied to particular characters' storylines. Unfortunately, as established in Chapter 2, representation creates expectation. After repeatedly seeing specific types of characters behaving a certain way, viewers expect all similar characters to exhibit the same characteristics and behaviours.<sup>156</sup> Although this may appear harmless, and even comedic, these expectations spill into reality, and viewers come to assume that real, complex people resemble simplistic onscreen characters.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, when inaccurate stereotypes and tropes warp viewers' expectations, it may lead viewers to misunderstand and demean LGBTQ+ people.

For the analysis, I classified the stereotypes and tropes into five categories: Men-Desiring Men Stereotypes, Women-Desiring Women Stereotypes, Queer Villains Stereotypes, Pity Your Gays Trope, and Bury Your Gays Trope. These terms are further defined and operationalised in the main section. In these discussions, specific epithets recur that are (in themselves) illustrative of the stereotypical nature of discourses around LGBTQ+ identities. The stereotypes' names are often obtained from social homophobic situations. For example, terms like "sissy" and "dyke" were originally insults, weaponised against effeminate men and masculine women. However, Russo,<sup>158</sup> re-appropriates these terms to refer to men-desiring men (MDM) and women-desiring women (WDW) stereotypes in academic terms.

Although the LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes differ, and their uses have evolved, a constant is that queer characters are continuously used as tools to drive the plot forward. These characters are stereotyped devices through which more central and heteronormative characters are explored. Similarly, queer characters' stories tend to follow pre-existing tropes and add colour to otherwise

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<sup>155</sup> Guy A. Boysen, et al, "The Mental Health Stereotype about Gay Men: The Relation Between Gay Men's Self-Stereotype and Stereotypes about Heterosexual Women and Lesbians", *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 30, no. 4 (2011), 330.

<sup>156</sup> Taya R. Cohen, et al, "Attitudes Toward Stereotypical Versus Counterstereotypical Gay Men and Lesbians", *Journal of Rex Research* 46, no. 4 (2009), 271-281.

<sup>157</sup> Cohen et al, "Attitudes Toward Stereotypical Gay."

<sup>158</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*.

formulaic plotlines. This practice is endemic in Hollywood and started with the employment of effeminate men as comedic devices.

### 3.1 Men-Desiring Men Stereotypes

Men-desiring-men (MDM) characters are often used as comic relief, and are not intended as serious characters.<sup>159</sup> They are masculinity-measuring yardsticks placed in juxtaposition to the hero character to measure and enhance his masculinity while also complementing the heroine character's femininity.<sup>160</sup> Like any other "type" of behaviour, "[h]omosexuality in the movies, whether overtly sexual or not, has always been seen in terms of what is or is not masculine."<sup>161</sup> Therefore, as heterosexual men were defined by their masculinity, MDM – seen as the opposites of the heterosexual heroes – were defined by their lack of masculinity.<sup>162</sup>

Viewers were trained to identify MDM characters through repetitive mannerisms, actions, and key words. Specific MDM-associated words such as "lavender,"<sup>163</sup> "lilac,"<sup>164</sup> "artistic,"<sup>165</sup> and "sensitive"<sup>166</sup> were encoded into scripts to signal to viewers that certain men characters were meant to be read as MDM. Films that portray MDM characters tend to frame them as one of three stereotypes: the Pansy, the Sissy, or the Queen (the overthinker, the coward, or the hysterical drama queen). These stereotypes evolved organically as Hollywood censorship strengthened and weakened. As time went on, the three became less similar and more cemented in their own ways. While early Hollywood probably never intended to create three MDM stereotypes, all three are still prevalent in current Hollywood and international films.

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<sup>159</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 4-59.

<sup>160</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 4.

<sup>162</sup> David Greven, "Contemporary Hollywood Masculinity and the Double Protagonist Film", *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009), 24.

<sup>163</sup> *The Broadway Melody*, directed by Roy Del Ruth (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) 1929.

<sup>164</sup> *Lover Come Back*, directed by Delbert Mann (USA: Universal Pictures) 1961.

<sup>165</sup> *Lover Come Back*, 1961.

<sup>166</sup> *Tea and Sympathy*, directed by Vincente Minnelli (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) 1956.

### 3.1.1 The Pansy

The Pansy was Hollywood's first stock character.<sup>167</sup> Before the Code censored all LGBTQ+ images in films, Hollywood films frequently featured MDM-representing characters in the form of Pansies: clever, skinny men who preferred to think and talk rather than drink and fight. "Pansy" is taken from the French word "pensée," which is a feminine reflexive meaning "to think."<sup>168</sup> Appropriately, Pansy characters in films are physically weak men who overthink. By placing Pansy characters in contrast to traditionally masculine heroes, Pansies emphasise the specific types of masculinities that Hollywood films want to celebrate. By being humiliated and shunned by heteronormative characters because of their lack of traditionally masculine traits, Pansies help reinforce gender norms.

As the first LGBTQ+ stereotype, the Pansy's origin can be traced back to Pre-Code Hollywood. The most notable Pre-Code Hollywood Pansy can be seen in *Algie, the Miner*,<sup>169</sup> a silent short film. In the film, Algie, the protagonist, is an upper-class man with over-the-top facial expressions and effeminate mannerisms who must prove that he is a "real man" by working as a miner for a year. This introduces the theme that city men are not "real men" while working-class rural men, who perform physical labour, are "real men." This theme is still prevalent in 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood and South African films. Among the miners, Algie appears significantly less masculine. He is constantly mocked and even carried around by the other men. After spending a year in the country, Algie returns to the city, no longer a Pansy, but instead a hyper-masculine bully who threatens people with a gun for sports and emasculates other men in the process. Algie completes his character arc from a "failed" man (Pansy) to a traditionally masculine hero. Algie became a template for Pansy characters: frail men who just needed to be taught how to think less and do more; in other words, how to be like typical Hollywood protagonists.

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<sup>167</sup> *The Celluloid Closet*, directed by Epstein and Friedman, 1995.

<sup>168</sup> Merriam-Webster. Com Dictionary, s.v., "pansy," accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pansy>.

<sup>169</sup> *Algie, the Miner*, directed by Harry Schenk and Edward Warren (USA: Solax Studios) 1912.

After the early Pansy caricatures, like Algie, the Pansy became a more reserved character. The protagonist of the film *Bride of Frankenstein*<sup>170</sup> is Dr Pretorius, a mad scientist who forces Henry Frankenstein to help him experiment with life and death. Pretorius's character conforms to the Pre-Code idea of the Pansy as a physically weak man who overthinks. However, unlike his Pre-Code counterparts, Pretorius is calm. The Code-era Pansy sheds its former eccentric qualities and takes on its current, more reserved form. As a Code-era queer man, Pretorius is depicted as a queer-coded asexual with tight-lipped speech. He is *A Single Man*<sup>171</sup> obsessed with another man: Dr Frankenstein. The two men spend a lot of time together, and finally, like a conjugal couple, they bring a new life into the world: the bride of Frankenstein.

In more recent films, the Pansy becomes a queer character designed to be more acceptable for conservative viewers. He is the calm intellectual who poses no threat to the virility of traditionally masculine men. Alex, the protagonist of the film *Alex Strangelove*,<sup>172</sup> is witty, intelligent, respectful to women and has no interest in sports. Because of these qualities, the viewer is not surprised when Alex realises that he is gay.<sup>173</sup> Despite being the protagonist, Alex is a bland character who the filmmakers strategically positioned not to threaten heteronormative ideals.

The word Pansy was the first name given to MDM characters. At the beginning of the Code-era in 1933, the term “pansy” was banned and replaced with “sissy”<sup>174</sup> – a new name for MDM characters. Along with the name replacement, the Pre-Code intellectual Pansy was replaced with the Code-era effeminate Sissy.

### 3.1.2 The Sissy

In the 1930s, as the Production Code took over Hollywood, gay characters seemed to disappear from films. This was until filmmakers mastered the art of queer-coding. Queer-coding is the

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<sup>170</sup> *Bride of Frankenstein*, directed James Whale (USA: Universal Pictures) 1935.

<sup>171</sup> A 21<sup>st</sup> century film about a gay man who must present himself as single to hide his sexuality. *A Single Man*, directed by Tom Ford (USA: The Weinstein Company) 2009.

<sup>172</sup> *Alex Strangelove*, directed by Craig Johnson (USA: Netflix) 2018.

<sup>173</sup> Note that the film employs bisexuality as a mere steppingstone for Alex to transition from straight to gay. This is a blatant example of bi-erasure.

<sup>174</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 40.

practice of encoding queer-associated behaviours onto characters. It signals to viewers that certain characters are meant to be interpreted as queer without having to represent LGBTQ+ people. The Code's censors, unaware that the Sissy character was used as a stand-in for MDM characters, allowed the stereotype to flourish.<sup>175</sup>

The Sissy is an emasculated cowardly man: the Code-era Pansy. The Sissy reinforces the idea that men must be brave by making cowardice in a man something comedic or even despicable. To imply gayness, filmmakers relied on a Freudian idea that SGD men are like women,<sup>176</sup> and therefore notified the viewer of a man character's same-gender attractions by making him effeminate. Simply put, the Sissy is a man placed in the position of a woman – often involuntarily. This is primarily done for comedic purposes. The message is clear: there is nothing more humiliating and deserving of ridicule for a man than to be like a woman in either appearance or social standing.<sup>177</sup> The Sissy has no agency and is passive – like most women characters in Code-era Hollywood films.

In order to slip past the Code's censors, the Sissy was portrayed as a celibate heterosexual, or asexual, until the Code was lifted. The asexual nature of the Sissy was not meant to represent asexual people. Through the practice of encoding and decoding, the Sissy was universally understood by filmmakers and viewers to be gay. He was just never shown in any romantic or sexual scenarios due to the Code-era restrictions.

The film *The Gay Divorcee*<sup>178</sup> arguably features the first Code-era Sissy. The film's (extravagantly named) side-character, Egbert, is a frail lawyer who is terrified of a woman when she shows interest in him. This is best illustrated during the song "Let's knock knees," where the woman attempts to seduce him, and he tries to reject her. Egbert is framed as a failed man because he is pursued instead of being the pursuer. The film places Egbert in the traditionally feminine position of the fragile and passive object of someone's desire. As Egbert struggles to escape his pursuer, she persists and injures him every time they knock their knees together. He embodies the Sissy: he

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<sup>175</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 40.

<sup>176</sup> Freud, "The Transformations of Puberty."

<sup>177</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 4-6.

<sup>178</sup> *The Gay Divorcee*, directed by Mark Sandrich (USA: RKO Radio Pictures) 1934.

is a man who is not only like a woman, but also physically weaker. By extension, he becomes the lesser man.

In Post-Code Hollywood, the Sissy became a standard comedic device. A traditionally masculine character would temporarily imitate the Sissy to achieve a specific goal. Comedically, the Sissy persona was used to juxtapose the selected character's "real" hyper-masculine self. These men managed to remain heteronormative idols while performing and mocking effeminacy in men. The films *Pillow Talk*,<sup>179</sup> and *I was a Male War Bride*<sup>180</sup> exemplify this tradition. Brad in *Pillow Talk* becomes a Sissy stereotype. When pretending to be a gay man, Brad consciously exhibits effeminate behaviour like drinking with his little finger extended and showing interest in "fabrics and colours."<sup>181</sup> Continuing the tradition of framing men like women, the film *I was a Male War Bride* follows hypermasculine army officer Henry, who disguises himself as a woman, in an attempt to return safely to the USA. The film derives its comedy from the humiliation Henry suffers when placed in the position of a woman, like being cat-called and disrespected by other men.

The Pansy and the Sissy both betray the masculine ideal. The Pansy by thinking and talking instead of acting, and the Sissy by showing fear and inhabiting degrading roles reserved for women. As Hollywood overcame the Production Code, a new type of MDM character came to the fore: the Queen.

### 3.1.3 The Queen

The Queen is unapologetically queer: he cares about fashion and appearance and does not hesitate to fawn over men. The character is usually portrayed as comic relief, someone who breaks the tension by worrying about something trivial, like the state of someone's hair, amid greater dramas. The Queen waltzes on and off the screen as the plot needs him to break tension or offer assistance. He is pure exaggeration. Most crucially, the Queen does not exist beyond the plot; he is not

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<sup>179</sup> *Pillow Talk*, directed by Michael Gordon (USA: Universal Pictures) 1959.

<sup>180</sup> *I was a Male War Bride*, directed by Howard Hawks (USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 1949.

<sup>181</sup> *Pillow Talk*, 1959.

complex enough. He is meant to be laughed at, enjoyed, and even adored by the viewer but he is never understood and nor does he evoke empathy.

The Queen is a Post-Code character and is therefore explicitly gay. Over time, the Queen stereotype evolved, and different types of Queens started appearing. His most notable incarnation is the Gay-Best-Friend (GBF). The GBF is most often found in chick flicks. This Queen is unique in that he serves as support to the heroine and not the male protagonist. He is usually the heroine's best friend, and his entire schedule and life plans revolve around her. Two of the best-known GBF characters are Damian from *Mean Girls*<sup>182</sup> and Nigel from *The Devil Wears Prada*.<sup>183</sup> In both films, the heroines find themselves in new environments where they struggle to fit in with the more glamorous women, and their GBFs come to their rescue.

In *Mean Girls*, Damian is one of the protagonist's, Cady's, only friends and when she needs to wear pink on a specific day of the week, Damian is the only friend who can lend her something pink to wear. Later, during a major conflict, Damian yells at Cady: "I want my pink shirt back!"<sup>184</sup> – an excellent example of a comedic line where the GBF focuses on something trivial amidst more significant quarrels. Similarly, in *The Devil Wears Prada*, when Andy, the protagonist, realises that she might lose her job unless she updates her wardrobe, she runs to Nigel, her work superior. Andy uses guilt to manipulate him into giving her a complete makeover, free designer clothes included. Throughout the rest of the film, Nigel – the top stylist at Vogue – is Andy's personal stylist. He is surprised when Andy wears an outfit that he did not choose for her. These GBF films create the impression that SGD men do not exist beyond the needs of heteronormative people and aspire to become some plain Jane's fairy godmother.

Onscreen drag queens also play into the Queen stereotype. Films like *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*<sup>185</sup> (*To Wong Foo*) depict drag queens as sassy gay men who wear their drag costumes as everyday clothes. While *Kinky Boots*<sup>186</sup> portrays drag as a performative art, *To*

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<sup>182</sup> *Mean Girls*, directed by Mark Waters (USA: Paramount Pictures) 2004.

<sup>183</sup> *The Devil Wears Prada*, directed by David Frankel (USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 2006.

<sup>184</sup> *Mean Girls*, 2004.

<sup>185</sup> *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*, directed by Beeban Kidron (USA: Universal Pictures), 1995.

<sup>186</sup> *Kinky Boots*, directed by Julia Jarrold (UK: BBC Films) 2005.

*Wong Foo* portrays the performative art as a lifestyle. In *To Wong Foo*, three drag queens go on a road trip across the USA, constantly dressed in drag. The film conflates drag (a performative art) with crossdressing (a fashion preference) and being gay (a sexual orientation). Films that depict MDM stereotypes portray femininity in men as a laughable trait. Furthermore, these films promote the heterosexual matrix by assuming a link between gender behaviours and sexuality.

### 3.2 Women-Desiring Women Stereotypes

Women-desiring women (WDW) stereotypes perform the same purpose as MDM stereotypes by presenting gendered behaviour as intrinsically linked to one's sex, gender, and sexual orientation, and by extension, one's value. Strangely, these two groups of stereotypes, MDM and WDW, are primarily rooted in sexism and present masculinity as superior to femininity. Where MDM stereotypes villainise femininity in men, WDW stereotypes celebrate masculinity in women. Russo agrees and states that:

[W]hile sissy men have always signalled a rank betrayal of the myth of male superiority, tomboy women seemed to reinforce that myth and have often indulged in acting it out.<sup>187</sup>

In other words, masculine women characters tend to be portrayed as deserving more respect than feminine women and men. In this way, SGD stereotypes serve to praise masculine qualities and criticise feminine qualities in all people.

WDW characters are, in many ways, the counterparts of MDM characters, usually by opposition. Where the MDM characters are represented as "too feminine," WDW characters are portrayed as "too masculine." Images of SGD women are "not only about lesbianism, but, in fact, are the containment of women's sexualities and independence."<sup>188</sup> Over time, just as MDM representation took on three different forms, WDW portrayals can also be divided into three types of stereotypes. The first is the Dyke, a dim-witted, physically strong woman who will act before, or even without,

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<sup>187</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 4-5.

<sup>188</sup> Becker, et al., "Lesbians and Film," 26.



thinking. The second is the Tomboy, a daredevil and “one of the boys,” who is comfortable in men’s clothes and talented in traditionally masculine activities like sport. The third WDW stereotype is Lesbian-chic,<sup>189</sup> the sexy lesbian or bisexual woman who plays into men’s fantasies.

### 3.2.1 The Dyke

The Dyke is the anti-feminine or butch WDW stereotype. As the Pansy’s opposite, she is a brawny woman who prefers to act instead of think. As such, the Dyke is physically stronger than the other women characters, traditionally unattractive, usually with short hair. She either wears no make-up or ugly make-up – which visually highlights her failures as a woman. She is muscular, especially in her arms, and wears men’s or otherwise unflattering clothing. The Dyke tends to exhibit negative characteristics associated with men. She is usually portrayed as constantly angry or overly aggressive.<sup>190</sup> She is traditionally isolated, socially rejected and often plays the bully.

The Dyke became notable during the late Code-era years and was meant to juxtapose “good” housewife-type women characters to emphasise their “acceptable” femininity. The film *Caged*<sup>191</sup> focuses on that exact message. In the film, the prison warden Dyke is a large and unattractive woman without any softness or kindness that women in the 1950s were expected to possess. She stands in direct contrast to the beautiful heroine, Marie, whom women viewers are meant to identify with. The warden is the embodiment of everything that Marie fears to become – a hardened mannish woman. The film pretends to be a biopic that exposes what women prisons are *really* like. The prison warden is framed as a bogeyman, a monster that threatens to possess misbehaving women. *Caged* presents the Dyke as something to fear and despise and, as seen near the end of the film, destroy.

Around the same time, a more likeable version of the Dyke also appeared in films: the Tomboy. Whereas the Dyke bullies women, the Tomboy befriends men. Both stereotypes serve to dissuade

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<sup>189</sup> Named after the craze in pre-code Hollywood wherein this stereotype was created. Don Kulick, “Humourless Lesbians,” in *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, eds. Delia Chiaro and Raffaella Baccolini, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): 89.

<sup>190</sup> Rosengurt in *The Boondock Saints*, for example. *The Boondock Saints*, directed by Troy Duffy (USA: Franchise Pictures) 1999.

<sup>191</sup> *Caged*, directed by John Cromwell (USA: Warner Bros.) 1950.

women from participating in traditionally masculine activities like working outside of the house or practising sports.

### 3.2.2 The Tomboy

The Tomboy is the boyish girl character who, as a celebration of masculinity, is praised for being “not like other girls.” Unlike the other SGD stereotypes, the Tomboy is likeable to men and women viewers. She tends to be physically smaller than the Dyke while still performing more masculine than feminine behaviours. As the effeminate Sissy’s counterpart, the Tomboy is sporty and tends to be skilled in activities that men enjoy. As such, as “one of the boys,” the men characters usually admire and respect her more than the other women characters. The plot attributes her tendency to be friends with men to her interest in supposedly masculine activities like participating in sports and socialising in bars. Her romantic storyline can go one of two ways: she either blooms into a traditionally feminine woman who falls in love with a man or is revealed as a lesbian.

During the Code, the Tomboy started as a heterosexual woman who must become effeminate before finding love. She is the “before” image in a make-over character arc. In post-Code films, Tomboys are usually secretly bisexual or lesbian women. Visually, the Tomboy is signified by her mannish clothing, often accompanied by a hat or short or tied-up hair. Although she does not resemble the Dyke in appearance, the Tomboy also embodies the “wrong” type of woman.

Similar to *Caged*, *Calamity Jane*<sup>192</sup> warns women against trying to occupy men’s roles. The film’s protagonist, Calamity, is a Tomboy cowgirl in the American Wild West. She has short hair, usually wears a hat and pants, and partakes in traditionally masculine activities like gunslinging and fighting. Even after she saves Danny, the man she is in love with, Danny still does not show any interest in her. This directly contrasts the films where the damsel falls in love with her saviour. In this case, the male damsel does not reward his saviour with his love and affection. Instead, Danny falls in love with a traditionally feminine woman, Katie. The film warns women that men will not find them attractive if they pursue “manly” activities or careers.

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<sup>192</sup> *Calamity Jane*, directed by David Butler (USA: Warner Bros.) 1954.

Other characters acknowledge her as a woman only after Calamity is dressed up in feminine clothes and make-up. One after the other, the men characters comment on Calamity's new appearance in happy surprise. Her achievements in battle, pale against her ability to look pretty. Here the film reiterates the idea that a woman's purpose is to look appealing to men.

Another vital aspect of *Calamity Jane* is Calamity's relationship with Katie. The two women move in together and, in an amusingly homoerotic song, sing about the benefits of "a woman's touch" while turning Calamity's bachelor pad into a homey cottage for the two of them. Calamity and Katie's relationship is more compelling and intimate than either woman's relationship with their supposed male love interests. Yet, as an early version of the Lesbian-chic stereotype, both women still somehow end up with men.

### 3.2.3 Lesbian-Chic

Lesbian-chic is the glamorisation and, more importantly, the fetishization of WDW characters for men viewers. As Russo explains, "[w]omen making love is a male fantasy; men making love it not – and men still run the industry."<sup>193</sup> Lesbian-chic serves the opposite purpose of the Queen. Both stereotypes are presented as sexy, but the Queen caters to women viewers who enjoy imagining him as their best friend. In contrast, Lesbian-chic caters to male viewers by depicting what is essentially soft-core lesbian pornography in mainstream films.

The films *Anger Management*<sup>194</sup> and *Dodgeball*<sup>195</sup> include Lesbian-chic characters that exist solely for the benefit of the heteronormative heroes. In *Anger Management*, Dave, the protagonist, meets Stacy and Gina, a "Psycho Lesbian"<sup>196</sup> pair, in his anger management meeting. Stacy and Gina are lovers who enjoy having threesomes with men. When Dave wants to make his ex-girlfriend jealous, the two beautiful lesbians excitedly dress up and join him on a date where they pretend to be interested in him. Stacey and Gina are crazy, sex-obsessed lesbians who exist to cater to men

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<sup>193</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 294.

<sup>194</sup> *Anger Management*, directed by Peter Segal (USA: Happy Madison) 2003.

<sup>195</sup> *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story*, directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber (USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 2004.

<sup>196</sup> Psycho Lesbian can be defined as: "Mentally unstable and/or morally corrupt. Can be seen as psychotic, angry and violent sociopath who will stalk and ruin your life. Can refer to both lesbians and bisexuals." Löff, "Love is Ours only in Death," 12.

viewers' fantasies and help Dave whenever he needs them. Their role of support to the male protagonist resembles the role of the Queen stereotype to a female protagonist.

In *Dodgeball*, Kate is the beautiful, unattainable object of Pete, the protagonist's, desire. Pete's friend insists that the only reason she is good at sport and does not show any interest in Pete is that "she gotta be a lesbian."<sup>197</sup> At the end of the film, Kate's girlfriend arrives and kisses her. Pete and his friend take this as confirmation that "she is a lesbian."<sup>198</sup> Upon hearing this, Kate turns around, offended, and states: "I'm not a lesbian... I'm bisexual."<sup>199</sup> Hereafter, Kate and her girlfriend walk up to Pete and the three of them make out. Despite not showing any interest in him throughout the entire film Kate suddenly becomes a threesome-hungry bisexual who desperately wants Pete and is willing to share her girlfriend. Kate's *Deux-ex-Machina*-bisexuality guarantees that Pete gets his happy ending.

Films like these present all women sexualities as fundamentally beneficial to men. Unlike SGD men, SGD women do not threaten heteronormative men. WDW are either unattractive Dykes, friendly Tomboys, or sexually available Lesbian-chics. Even when WDW are threats to men in films, they still serve to be fetishized by men viewers. The next category, Queer Villains, explores the benign and terrifying types of LGBTQ+ antagonists.

### 3.3 Queer Villains

The Queer Villains stereotype links queerness to villainy or depravity. Queer Villains serve to denigrate the LGBTQ+ community. This section discusses how Hollywood films frame queerness as a character flaw associated with villains. This section first examines how language in films has been strategically weaponised against the LGBTQ+ community. Thereafter, I explore Queer-Coded Villains – villains made comedic through queer-coding. Lastly, I explore the two more problematic Queer Villain stereotypes, namely Queer Predators and Queer Killers.

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<sup>197</sup> *Dodgeball*, 2004.

<sup>198</sup> *Dodgeball*, 2004.

<sup>199</sup> *Dodgeball*, 2004.

Language and messaging are powerful tools used by Hollywood filmmakers to connect LGBTQ+ characteristics with wickedness. A prominent example of this practice is the overuse of the gay slur: “faggot.”<sup>200</sup> Barry Sandler, a renowned screenwriter, best explains the problem with the normalisation of the slur “faggot:”

I never hear the word “nigger” used unless it’s either by two black people as a form of affection or by a totally bigoted southern sheriff... to point out his ignorance... “Faggot” is not used in that way; “faggot” is used by just anyone talking to anyone else.<sup>201</sup>

Unlike other derogatory slurs, the word “faggot” is most often used by “good” characters that viewers are meant to identify with. The slur is disproportionately used by A-list actors portraying “likeable” characters in mainstream films. The 1985 hit film *Teen Wolf*<sup>202</sup> centres around Scott,<sup>203</sup> who is secretly a werewolf. When Scott tells his best friend Stiles that he wants to tell him something, Stiles becomes terrified and says: “Are you gonna tell me you’re a fag? ‘Cause if you’re gonna tell me you’re a fag, I don’t think I can handle it.”<sup>204</sup> Repulsed, Scott assures Stiles that he is “not a fag,” he is “just” a werewolf. This scene is meant to be comedic but implies that it is worse to be gay than a murderous, cannibalistic monster.

More consequentially, in *Glengarry Glen Ross*,<sup>205</sup> a motivational speaker, Blake,<sup>206</sup> delivers a monologue to failing salesmen. This monologue has become iconic with classic lines like “coffee is for closers!”<sup>207</sup> Blake is portrayed as an admirable character, here to teach the failing men how to be more like him. During his haranguing speech, Blake snaps: “You hear me? You fucking faggots!” In talking down to them, he uses “faggot” as an insult. Repeated use of gay slurs by admirable characters not only insinuate that there is something inherently wrong with being gay

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<sup>200</sup> As a word that is prevalent in mainstream films, the slur must be addressed and analysed in this chapter.

<sup>201</sup> *The Celluloid Closet*, 1995.

<sup>202</sup> *Teen Wolf*, directed by Rod Daniel (USA: Atlantic Releasing Corporation) 1985.

<sup>203</sup> Portrayed by Michael J. Fox.

<sup>204</sup> *Teen Wolf*, 1985.

<sup>205</sup> *Glengarry Glen Ross*, directed by James Foley (USA: New Line Cinema) 1992.

<sup>206</sup> Portrayed by Alec Baldwin.

<sup>207</sup> *Glengarry Glen Ross*, 1992

but also presents “gay-bashing”<sup>208</sup> as a “rite of passage”<sup>209</sup> for young men. This implies that homophobia is a critical masculine quality.

In essence, Hollywood films present homophobia as a positive quality and queerness as a negative one. To illustrate this, this section explores three types of queer villain stereotypes that I have identified in Hollywood films, namely: Queer-Coded Villains, Queer Predators, and Queer Killers. Unlike SGD stereotypes, most Queer Villains are not meant to be laughed at; they are not funny. Instead, some of the most disturbing movie villains have been Queer Killers, such as Norman Bates from *Psycho*<sup>210</sup> and Buffalo Bill from *The Silence of the Lambs*.<sup>211</sup> This section explores the history and purpose of Queer Villains with reference to specific film examples as illustrations.

### 3.3.1 Queer-Coded Villains

Through MDM and WDW stereotypes, Hollywood coached filmgoers to associate certain appearances, behaviours, and mannerisms with masculinity and femininity. Most importantly, these stereotypes trained viewers to despise or distrust femininity in men and masculinity in women. After filmmakers mastered the art of queer-coding characters, they increasingly assigned queer-associated traits and behaviours to antagonists, which birthed the Queer-Coded Villains stereotype.

Queer-Coded Villains are first and foremost villains – with queer qualities. Features, characteristics, and behaviours that viewers have been trained to associate with comic reliefs and yard-stick queer characters are encoded into villains. Queer-coding makes these villains comedic and unthreatening, and they do not pose a real threat to the more traditionally heteronormative leads. As Code-era characters, Queer-Coded Villains’ sexualities were never addressed. After the Code was repealed, Hollywood films employed Queer-Coded Villains as non-sexual comedic

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<sup>208</sup> Colloquial term for physical or verbal violence against SGD people.

<sup>209</sup> Theo Van der Meer, “Gay Bashing: A Rite of Passage?”, *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 5, no. 2 (2003) 153-165.

<sup>210</sup> *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (USA: Paramount Pictures) 1960.

<sup>211</sup> *The Silence of the Lambs*, directed by Jonathan Demme (USA: Orion Pictures) 1991.

devices as seen in most Walt Disney Studios animated films such as *Hercules*,<sup>212</sup> *Wreck-It Ralph*<sup>213</sup> and *The Princess and the Frog*.<sup>214</sup>

In *Hercules*, Hades, the villain, is a GBF Queen stereotype with finicky mannerisms and witty commentary. In *Wreck-It Ralph*, Candy King is a physically small Sissy dressed in a frilly purple suit. In *The Princess and the Frog*, Dr Facilier is a comically skinny and frail manipulator with a thin moustache and a tight-fitted purple suit. Disney uses purple as a visual queer-signalling cue for most of their Queer-Coded Villains, similar to Code-era's use of "lilac" and "lavender" as queer-signalling words.

After the abolition of the Code, when filmmakers were no longer restricted in depicting SGD characters and violent scenes, Queer-Coded Villains evolved into new, more sinister forms of antagonists. In the Horror genre, filmmakers use the Freudian concept of the "uncanny"<sup>215</sup> to create disturbing characters that are simultaneously unfamiliar and disturbingly similar to "normal" people.<sup>216</sup> As a socially oppressed and largely unknown group, LGBTQ+ characters were boxed into this trope. Therefore, Post-Code Hollywood saw the conception of uncanny Queer-Villains like Queer Predators and Queer Killers. Unlike the comedic Queer-Coded Villains, these new villains are not meant to be laughed at. They are dangerous, violent and signify a threat to society; therefore, they need to be feared or hated.

### 3.3.2 Queer Predators

The Queer Predator is a sexual deviant who commits sex crimes, usually against people of the same gender. This stereotype equates same-gender attraction with predatory behaviour. It poses the idea that LGBTQ+ people are inevitably sex offenders.

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<sup>212</sup> *Hercules*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker (USA: Walt Disney Pictures) 1997.

<sup>213</sup> *Wreck-It Ralph*, directed by Rich Moore (USA: Walt Disney Pictures) 2012.

<sup>214</sup> *The Princess and the Frog*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker (USA: Walt Disney Pictures) 2009.

<sup>215</sup> "Uncanny" according to Freud, is a sense of unease and even fear generated by seeing, hearing, or experiencing something familiar and like oneself which is made uncomfortably inexplicable through the introduction of something uncertain or unknown. This unfamiliar likeness maintains its state of being something uncanny when the consumer's focus is kept on something else, so the mind cannot solve the mystery and, thereby, end the unease.

<sup>216</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" In *The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 14: Art and Literature*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 339-376.

The first iconic Queer Predator is Sebastian from *Suddenly, Last Summer*.<sup>217</sup> In the film, Sebastian is a faceless monster who uses his mother and his cousin to “procure”<sup>218</sup> young men for him. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Sebastian sexually abused the boys. One day, as Sebastian is about to depart from Southern Europe, where he becomes “fed up with the dark ones,”<sup>219</sup> the village’s young men start chasing him. They overwhelm Sebastian, tear him apart and eat his flesh. This ending mirrors that of *Frankenstein*,<sup>220</sup> where the community comes together to destroy a monster.

The Queer Predator stereotype further antagonised LGBTQ+ people by implying that all kinds of depravity ultimately stem from queerness. Current homophobic and transphobic rhetoric still rehashes unfounded reasons for fearing LGBTQ+ people.<sup>221</sup> The most notable is the myth that it is predominantly SGD men who commit rape in prisons,<sup>222</sup> although the Bureau of Justice Statistics research shows that SGD men are far more likely to be the victims of rape than the perpetrators.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to be murdered by heteronormative people than the other way around.<sup>224</sup> Yet, the predominance of the Queer Killer stereotype implies that LGBTQ+ people are not only potential murderers but also ruthless killers.

### 3.3.3 Queer Killers

While the American public was slowly learning more about LGBTQ+ people and realities, the LGBTQ+ community was still primarily considered outsiders and even potential threats to society. Films capitalised on the misinformation and negative assumptions about LGBTQ+ people to make

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<sup>217</sup> *Suddenly, Last Summer*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz (USA: Columbia Pictures) 1959.

<sup>218</sup> *Suddenly, Last Summer*, 1959.

<sup>219</sup> *Suddenly, Last Summer*, 1959.

<sup>220</sup> *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale (USA: Universal Pictures) 1931.

<sup>221</sup> Graeme Reid, “Political Homophobia Ramps Up,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/13/political-homophobia-ramps>.

<sup>222</sup> As perpetuated in *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont (USA: Columbia Pictures) 1994.

<sup>223</sup> Sadhbh Walshe, “The Grim Truth of being Gay in Prison,” *The Guardian*, March 7, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/mar/07/grim-truth-gay-in-prison>.

<sup>224</sup> Criminal Justice Information Services Division, “2019 Hate Crime Statistics: Victims,” FBI.gov., accessed February 15, 2021, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/victims>.



onscreen villains more terrifying. This process established Queer Killers as recurring horror-movie villains.

Queer Killers are LGBTQ+ characters that commit murder. Their murderous compulsions are framed as intrinsically linked to their “divergent” sexual orientations or gender identities. Famous onscreen killers in mainstream films like *Cruising*,<sup>225</sup> *Dressed to Kill*<sup>226</sup> and *Monster*<sup>227</sup> are portrayed as inherently evil, which stems from their queer identities. *Cruising* centres around a police officer who becomes a serial killer after realising that he is gay. *Dressed to Kill* focuses on a mentally disturbed psychologist whose transgender persona is a compulsive killer. *Monster* tells the true story of serial killer Aileen Wuornos. Instead of attributing her murderous urges to the abuse she suffered from men, the film emphasises her relationship with another woman while she committed the murders – implying that SGD is responsible for her actions.

Aileen is an example of a subcategory of the Queer Killer, known as the Lethal Lesbian. B. Ruby Rich – renowned queer-film critic, author of the book *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*,<sup>228</sup> and known for coining the term “New Queer Cinema – examines the effect that Lesbian-chic had on Hollywood and viewers’ perceptions of SGD women. In her book, she explores and how these perceptions facilitated the creation of Lethal Lesbians.<sup>229</sup> Lethal Lesbians are an offspring of Lesbian Chic because the stereotype sexualises queer women who kill men. These women are lesbians or bisexual women who flirt with men or willingly fetishize themselves for the gratification of men characters and viewers.

The most prominent example of this is the bisexual serial killer Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct*.<sup>230</sup> In the film, Catherine is a femme fatale in an SGD relationship with a psycho lesbian archetype. Catherine blatantly uses her sexuality to not only lure in her men victims before savagely stabbing them to death with an ice pick during her sexual climax but also to seduce the

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<sup>225</sup> *Cruising*, directed by William Friedkin (USA: United Artists) 1980.

<sup>226</sup> *Dressed to Kill*, directed by Brian de Palma (USA: Filmways Pictures) 1980.

<sup>227</sup> *Monster*, directed by Patty Jenkins (USA: Newmarket Films) 2003.

<sup>228</sup> B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>229</sup> B. Ruby Rich, “Lethal Lesbians: The Cinematic Inscription of Murderous Desire,” in *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013): 103 – 122.

<sup>230</sup> *Basic Instinct*, directed by Paul Verhoeven (USA: TriStar Pictures) 1992.

police officers and detectives who suspect her of these murders.<sup>231</sup> In the end she is tamed by the lead – a traditionally masculine police detective – when she falls in love with him and, in what seems to be the end to her killer career, decides not to kill him.

Like Catherine Tramell, Queer Villains are memorable plot devices that add a new level of uncanny unease to already disturbing villains. Hollywood films primarily cater to heteronormative viewers and, as threats to heteronormative characters and values Queer Villains are usually punished at the end of these films. These punishments are, however, not reserved for Queer Villains exclusively, but also for non-villainous queer characters. LGBTQ+ characters are far more likely to live miserable lives or have unhappy endings in films. I refer to this story trope as Pity Your Gays.

### 3.4 Pity Your Gays

In Hollywood films, LGBTQ+ people must be laughed at,<sup>232</sup> feared,<sup>233</sup> or pitied. The chapter's last two categories, Pity Your Gays (PYG)<sup>234</sup> and Bury Your Gays, look at how Hollywood constructs LGBTQ+ identities and experiences as inevitably tragic and pitiful. Many academics<sup>235</sup> and informal critics<sup>236</sup> discuss the depiction of queerness as tragic under the Bury Your Gays umbrella term. However, and unfortunately, there are numerous films where queer characters suffer without dying (Pity Your Gays) and suffer before finally dying (Bury Your Gays), which warrants distinguishing between the two different tropes.

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<sup>231</sup> In the film's most famous scene she sits in an interrogation room wearing an iconic white turtleneck dress, surrounded by men. While daring the police to prove that she is guilty, she uncrosses her legs and explicitly reveals that she is wearing no underwear, before crossing her legs again.

<sup>232</sup> As seen in the MDM and WDW stereotypes.

<sup>233</sup> As seen with Queer-Coded Villains and Queer Monsters.

<sup>234</sup> As the other side of the coin of the Bury Your Gays trope, parallel naming only seemed appropriate.

<sup>235</sup> When introducing the "tragic queer" cliché, Matsuuchi adds in brackets "bury your gays." Ann Matsuuchi, "'Happily Ever After': The Tragic Queer and Delany's Comic Book Fairy Tale", *African American Review* 48, no. 3 (2015), 275. Hulan and DeMuth define the BYG trope in specific relation to one half of a queer couple dying and they encapsulate the grief of the survivor under the umbrella term "Bury Your Gays." Haley Hulan and Danielle DeMuth, "Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context," *McNair Scholars Journal* 21, no. 1 (2017), 17-24.

<sup>236</sup> LGBTQ+ YouTuber, Rowan Ellis, for example, when discussing the BYG trope, briefly mentions the practice that queer characters are portrayed as inevitably miserable as part of the trope. Rowan Ellis, "Bury Your Gays: Why do LGBT Characters Always have to Die?," Uploaded October 17, 2015, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3YWz8SDRhE&ab\\_channel=RowanEllis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3YWz8SDRhE&ab_channel=RowanEllis).

The PYG trope suggests that LGBTQ+ people are inherently unhappy and have tragic lives. The trope typically occurs in three ways, namely: No-Happy-Endings, Misery, and Victimhood. In the No-Happy-Endings application of the PYG trope, the SGD couple does not end up together. In the Misery application of the trope, the queer character(s) encounter tragedy or have unfortunate lives, often through contracting fatal illnesses, suffering from a debilitating mental illness, or being placed in unbearable circumstances. In the Victimhood application, the queer character(s) become the victims of violence or sexual assaults. This section looks at the purpose and origins of the PYG trope and explores the three different ways it is applied with specific film examples.

In terms of Hollywood history, like most queer tropes and stereotypes, the Pity Your Gays trope can be traced back to the Hays Code. Because SGD characters' sexualities were not portrayed, SGD characters remained single and ended up alone. As stated earlier, denying gay and lesbian characters romantic partners does not equate to asexual representation; these characters are SGD characters, filmmakers just refuse to portray them in romantic situations.

There are two prominent reasons behind the PYG trope: Queer Dissuasion and Misery Porn. Queer Dissuasion, as I named it, is the practice of subtly or blatantly trying to convince people that it is better to be heteronormative than queer. In other words, Queer Dissuasion attempts to convince LGBTQ+ people to stay in the metaphorical Closet by repetitively showing LGBTQ+ lives as miserable. Misery Porn, a term coined by LGBTQ+ YouTube vlogger Rowan Ellis,<sup>237</sup> refers to a particular type of self-righteous enjoyment generated within heteronormative viewers when repeatedly witnessing the sufferings of LGBTQ+ characters on screen. Importantly, this is not a sadistic enjoyment. These viewers derive a sense of accomplishment from supporting the onscreen LGBTQ+ characters and directing their anger at the onscreen homophobic or transphobic events. This practice, unfortunately, leads to a false sense of accomplishment in the viewers. Instead of encouraging them to be introspective or to actively change the homophobic and transphobic systems in their environments, Misery Porn enables viewers to pat themselves on the backs for not

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<sup>237</sup> Ellis, "Bury Your Gays."

being *as* bigoted as the fictional characters in the films. Misery Porn exists for smug enjoyment and not as a call to action.<sup>238</sup>

Pullen notes that tragedy is “inevitably a recognizable narrative for gay and lesbian audiences,”<sup>239</sup> which may identify with the sufferings depicted in the films. Although one can argue that it is essential for art to reflect life, I argue that it is more important to consider the negative impact the high quantity of PYG narratives have on LGBTQ+ viewers.

Many sources<sup>240</sup> attribute the origins of compulsively making LGBTQ+ characters miserable to Marijane Meaker’s novel *Spring Fire*.<sup>241</sup> Meaker wrote her lesbian romance novel in the late 1940s and early 1950s under the pseudonym Vin Packer. However, before publishing, she was advised that readers would not accept the story if the lesbians ended up together. Meaker therefore changed the ending: one lover ends up institutionalised while the other swears off her lesbianism.<sup>242</sup> *Spring Fire*, recognised as the first PYG text, sets up a formula – No-Happy Ending for queers – followed by many 21<sup>st</sup> century LGBTQ+ films. This No-Happy Endings trope follows an SGD couple who, despite their best efforts, end up being ripped apart due to something outside of their control, like mental illness or societal pressures.

### 3.4.1 No-Happy-Endings

A part of the beautiful sadness of many love stories is the fact that not all lovers end up together and receive their happy endings.<sup>243</sup> However, when the lovers are of the same gender, the odds of this skyrocket. This is the essence of the No-Happy-Endings for queer characters trope in Hollywood films. According to Foucault, the reason for this is that:

People can tolerate two homosexuals they see leaving together, but if the next day they're smiling, holding hands and tenderly embracing one another, then they can't be

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<sup>238</sup> Ellis, “Bury Your Gays.”

<sup>239</sup> Pullen “Heroic Gay Characters in Popular Film,” 402.

<sup>240</sup> Hulan and DeMuth, “Bury Your Gays.”

<sup>241</sup> Vin Packer, *Spring Fire*, 1952.

<sup>242</sup> Hulan and DeMuth, “Bury Your Gays.”

<sup>243</sup> As seen in classics like *Titanic*, directed James Cameron (USA: Paramount Pictures) 1997, and *Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz (USA: Warner Bros.) 1942.

forgiven. It is not the departure for pleasure that is intolerable, it is waking up happy.<sup>244</sup>

By creating LGBTQ+ love stories that end in tragedy or separation, filmmakers produce movies that cater to both queer and heteronormative viewers – but in starkly different ways. Queer viewers get to see an SGD love story, even though it is brief and the love is temporary. Heteronormative viewers, and specifically, homophobic audience members, get to see an SGD couple fall apart. By having the SGD couple separate at the end, the film reasserts heteronormative assumptions that “real” relationships are for straight couples. In contrast, SGD couples merely have inconsequential flings, which ends in failure. Similarly, by having one half of an SGD couple become mentally unwell or die – thereby separating the lovers – the film creates a sense of pity in the viewer while reasserting the status quo.

LGBTQ+ characters are more likely to remain or end up alone, than to live “happily ever after” with their preferred partner. In the case that an SGD character is allowed a counterpart, their lover usually dies<sup>245</sup> or is sent away.<sup>246</sup> LGBTQ+ viewers are bombarded by images of heterosexual couples with happy endings, with entire film genres dedicated to it,<sup>247</sup> but struggle to find any love stories that resemble their realities or desires. This reinforces the social expectation that they will end up alone, without love.

*Call me by your Name*<sup>248</sup> is a clear example of the No-Happy Endings trope. The film tells the story of 17-year-old Elio’s first great love and his first SGD relationship. The film is set in 1983, and Elio’s love interest is 24-year-old Oliver. The two have a brief but intense romantic and sexual relationship until Oliver returns home to the USA. Elio learns that Oliver is engaged to be married to a woman, and the film ends with Elio heartbroken and alone. *Call me by your Name* is seen as a vital LGBTQ+ love story.<sup>249</sup> The popularity of *Call me by your Name* signifies the disturbing

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<sup>244</sup> Leo Bersani, “Foucault, Freud, Fantasy, and Power,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2 (1995), 11.

<sup>245</sup> *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee (USA: Focus Feature) 2005.

<sup>246</sup> *I Love You Philip Morris*, directed by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra (USA: LD Entertainment) 2009.

<sup>247</sup> The Romance and Romantic Comedy genres for example.

<sup>248</sup> *Call me by your Name*, directed by Luca Guadagnino (USA: Sony Pictures Classics) 2017.

<sup>249</sup> Nicole Campisano, “‘Call me by your Name’ Receives Global Praise,” *iItaly*, December 19, 2017, <http://www.iitaly.org/magazine/focus/art-culture/article/call-me-your-name-receives-global-praise>.

lack of LGBTQ+ love story films. The age gap between Elio and Oliver – Elio being a teenager and Oliver being an adult – raises concerns because the film “glorifies predatory behaviour.”<sup>250</sup> A more critical viewing of the film reveals that Oliver is undoubtedly aware of his influence over the inexperienced and naïve Elio.

### 3.4.2 Misery

The second application of the PYG trope, namely Misery, refers to the tendency for LGBTQ+ characters to be tragic or unhappy characters in films. This is a “narrative cliché of the tragic queer,”<sup>251</sup> as seen in heteronormative-focussed films like *Little Miss Sunshine*<sup>252</sup> and *Greenbook*.<sup>253</sup> The Misery PYG trope consists of a (usually) singular LGBTQ+ character who undergoes more tragedy and trauma than any other character. These hardships suffered by the Misery-assigned character are used to emphasise the other characters’ empathy or kindness. Despite being the one who suffers, the LGBTQ+ character becomes a prop through which the softer sides of heteronormative characters are explored.

In his essay on how LGBTQ+ protagonists also play into the Misery PYG trope, Christopher Pullen – English author and scholar – notes that even when an LGBTQ+ character is the hero or the protagonist, their character still has tragic determination central to their identity.<sup>254</sup> Pullen focuses on “the iconic appropriation of the heroic character, which for gay identity [...] often involves a focus on tragedy.”<sup>255</sup> His point is illustrated in films like *Moonlight* and *Can You Ever Forgive me?*<sup>256</sup> Both films have queer protagonists, and both characters are lonely, depressed, and unhappy throughout most of the film.

The Misery PYG trope establishes a melancholic loner or outsider LGBTQ+ character. The unhappiness is presented as a fundamental part of the character. In cases where the character’s

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<sup>250</sup> Karamo Brown, Twitter Post, December 12, 2018, <https://twitter.com/karamo/status/1072635297857503232?lang=en>.

<sup>251</sup> Matsuuchi, “Happily Ever After,” 275.

<sup>252</sup> *Little Miss Sunshine*, directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris (USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures) 2006.

<sup>253</sup> *Green Book*, directed by Peter Farrelly (USA: Universal Pictures) 2018.

<sup>254</sup> Pullen, “Heroic Gay Characters in Popular Films,” 399.

<sup>255</sup> Pullen, “Heroic Gay Characters in Popular Film,” 399.

<sup>256</sup> *Can you ever Forgive Me?*, directed by Marielle Heller (USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures) 2018.

misery is not something inherent, it is often caused by a traumatic event like violence or sexual assault. These PYG depictions occur regularly enough that it needs to be distinguished in this chapter under the subsection Victimhood.

### 3.4.3 Victimhood

Even when LGBTQ+ characters are the protagonists in films, they are depicted as vulnerable and predetermined victims.<sup>257</sup> This stands in stark contrast with heteronormative characters. Pullen best describes the Victimhood trope:

The problem of over-determining the gay hero as ‘victim’ is that the narrative focuses on the punishment and trial of the central character, rather than on the use, or compatibility, of the character in the larger narrative world.<sup>258</sup>

The Victimhood trope suggests that LGBTQ+ people cannot expect to live safe lives in the real world, and that homophobia and homophobic attacks will inevitably cross LGBTQ+ people’s paths. This leads LGBTQ+ characters, even those who are the film’s protagonists, to remain othered.

The PYG trope conflates suffering with being queer. No-Happy-Ending LGBTQ+ couples are ripped apart by a variety of possible factors. The most notable of these is death. One half of the couple dies in these stories, and the other is left depressed and alone, as seen in films like *Cloud Atlas*,<sup>259</sup> *It Chapter Two*<sup>260</sup> and *Philadelphia*.<sup>261</sup> Similarly, PYG characters’ sufferings sometimes only end in death. Bury Your Gays is the other half of the PYG trope. Both tropes normalise the sufferings of LGBTQ+ people. Bury Your Gays also trivialises their deaths.

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<sup>257</sup> Pullen, “Heroic Gay Characters in Popular Film”, 400.

<sup>258</sup> Pullen, “Heroic Gay Characters in Popular Film”, 400.

<sup>259</sup> *Cloud Atlas*, directed by Lana Wachowski, Tom Tykwer, and Lilly Wachowski (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures) 2012.

<sup>260</sup> *It Chapter Two*, directed by Andy Muschietti (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures) 2019.

<sup>261</sup> *Philadelphia*, directed by Jonathan Demme (USA: TriStar Pictures) 1993.

### 3.5 Bury Your Gays

As discussed in the History of Hollywood (in Chapter 1), Code-Era filmmakers were allowed to feature LGBTQ+ characters on the condition that these characters were punished. These characters were often portrayed as having tragic lives (as discussed under the Pity Your Gays trope). However, the most common type of punishment was death.<sup>262</sup> This practice became known as the Bury Your Gays (BYG) trope.<sup>263</sup>

It is important to note that not all deaths of LGBTQ+ characters result from the BYG trope. Despite having LGBTQ+ characters die on screen, films like *The Normal Heart*<sup>264</sup> and *Milk*<sup>265</sup> focus on their lives, not only on their deaths. *The Normal Heart* explores how the AIDS epidemic in the USA affected the LGBTQ+ community, and most of the gay characters die from the virus. These deaths are not merely plot points. Instead, the plot is centred on the LGBTQ+ characters' lives and deaths. *Milk* tells the true story of Harvey Milk, an openly gay politician and gay rights activist, who was murdered by a disgruntled politician. The film focuses on Milk's life, and his potential. His death is central to the plot, yet it is not the focus of the film. The BYG trope, by contrast, uses the deaths of LGBTQ+ characters as plot points, and films that employ the trope focus on the characters' deaths, not their lives.

According to journalist James Rawson's 2013 article on the disproportionate SGD character deaths in Academy Award-winning films from 1993 – 2013, there were:

257 Academy Award-nominated portrayals of heterosexual characters, and 23 of gay, bisexual or transsexual characters. Of the heterosexual characters, 16.5% (59) die. Of

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<sup>262</sup> *The Celluloid Closet*, 1995.

<sup>263</sup> The trope became known as "Bury Your Gays" sometime before 2010. Kira Deshler, "Not Another Dead Lesbian: The Bury Your Gays Trope, Queer Grief, and *The 100*, (Honours mini-dissertation: Whitman College, 2017): 6.

<sup>264</sup> *The Normal Heart*, directed by Ryan Murphy (USA: HBO) 2014.

<sup>265</sup> *Milk*, directed by Gus Van Sant (USA: Focus Feature) 2008.



the LGBT characters, 56.5% (13) die. Of the 10 LGBT characters who live, only four get happy endings.<sup>266</sup>

LGBTQ+ people are significantly underrepresented in mainstream films, but even worse, when they are represented, their characters are more than three times as likely to die than their heteronormative counterparts. Rawson's article is not about keeping tally. It is about representation. It is about the LGBTQ+ person sitting in a cinema, finally seeing a character that resembles them and knowing that this character has a greater chance of dying than any other character in the film.

The BYG trope has caused LGBTQ+ people to expect the deaths of LGBTQ+ characters. This makes them reluctant to identify with their onscreen counterparts. As discussed in Chapter 2, representation matters because it directly influences personal identity formation. LGBTQ+ representations are riddled with death. Therefore, it is no surprise that LGBTQ+ youths are five times more likely to commit suicide than their heteronormative peers.<sup>267</sup>

It is important to note that highlighting the BYG trope is not saying that LGBTQ+ characters may never die in films. Just like any character, if the story leads them down this path, they may die. Alexa Bakalarski writes in her article "Time to put the 'Bury Your Gays' trope to rest"<sup>268</sup> that filmmakers cannot treat the deaths of marginalised characters the same way as the deaths of normative characters.<sup>269</sup> As LGBTQ+ characters die at a significantly higher rate than heteronormative characters, it is essential to consider the impact that seeing these deaths has on LGBTQ+ viewers. Additionally, given how frequently this trope is employed, it is hard to argue that some – if not most – of these deaths are not simply a result of habit or trope employing.

This section is divided according to the most common causes of death for LGBTQ+ characters in Hollywood films: Suicide, Purge, and AIDS. The three causes are linked to different aspects of the

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<sup>266</sup> James Rawson, "Why are Gay Characters at the Top of Hollywood's Kill List?," *The Guardian*, June 11, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/jun/11/gay-characters-hollywood-films>.

<sup>267</sup> Michelle M. Johns, et al., "Trends in Violence Victimization and Suicide Risk by Sexual Identity Among High School Students – Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2015-2019," *MMWR* 69, no. 1 (2020): 19-26.

<sup>268</sup> Alexa Bakalarski, "Time to Put the 'Bury Your Gays' Trope to Rest", *University Wire* (2016).

<sup>269</sup> Bakalarski, "Time to Put the Trope to Rest."

characters' worlds. Suicide, as self-inflicted, is personal and caused by the LGBTQ+ character's Internal World. Purge refers to how an LGBTQ+ character is removed from their Social World by either being murdered or executed. Lastly, films present AIDS as a natural cause of death that primarily targets LGBTQ+ people. Here, the Natural World is depicted as being weaponised against LGBTQ+ characters.

### 3.5.1 Internal World: Suicide

According to Russo, "the very first gay man to be presented on film (Paul Körner in *Anders als die Andern*<sup>270</sup>) ended in the obligatory suicide that would mark the fate of screen gays for years to come."<sup>271</sup> Russo explains that Paul was driven to suicide after being rejected for being gay. The film aimed to evoke empathy from viewers and to show the damaging impact of homophobia. *Anders als die Andern* is not an example of BYG because Paul's suicide serves a purpose beyond driving the plot forward: Paul's struggles and eventual death make up the plot. Unfortunately, having an LGBTQ+ character commit suicide has become commonplace in many films and is usually done to only serve the larger story. However, the intentions behind the BYG trope have become blurred because the results look the same: a queer person kills themselves.

The Suicide BYG trope is one of the most prevalent queer movie tropes. The suicide tends to conclude a tragic queer character's journey. After much suffering, the LGBTQ+ character finally commits suicide to escape unbearable circumstances. This is best illustrated in films like *And Justice for All*<sup>272</sup> and *Boy Erased*.<sup>273</sup>

*And Justice for All* is a critically acclaimed film starring Al Pacino and famous for the lines: "You're out of order! The whole trial is out of order!"<sup>274</sup> In the film, a side character named Ralph Agee, a transgender person, receives an unjustly harsh prison sentence and hangs themselves within moments of arriving in prison. Ralph is a tragic character who sees suicide as their only way out.

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<sup>270</sup> *Anders als die Andern (Different from the Others)*, directed by Richard Oswald (Weimar Republic: Richard Oswald-Film Berlin) 1919.

<sup>271</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 21.

<sup>272</sup> *And Justice for All*, directed by Norman Jewison (USA: Columbia Pictures) 1979.

<sup>273</sup> *Boy Erased*, directed by Joel Edgerton (USA: Focus Feature) 2018.

<sup>274</sup> *And Justice for All*, 1979.

*Boy Erased* explores a gay conversion camp. In the film, one character, Cameron, becomes the target of hate and violence. He is constantly humiliated and, as part of an apparent exorcism ritual, several people take turns literally Bible-bashing him. He finally, and quite expectedly, commits suicide. His suicide spurs on the protagonist to start writing about the horrors that occur in conversion camp facilities. Cameron's death is nothing more than a catalyst, something the viewer anticipated after first seeing him.

These films portray queer suicide as the unavoidable next step and logical extension of the Pity Your Gays Trope. Following the tradition of presenting the death of an LGBTQ+ character as inevitable, filmmakers found different ways to lead death-marked queer characters to their deaths. I refer to this form of the trope as Purge.

### 3.5.2 Social World: Purge

LGBTQ+ character deaths are common and expected in films. This section explores the different ways in which these characters' deaths are portrayed as inevitable and serve to purge them from society. These Purges occur in two ways: innocent LGBTQ+ characters are murdered for being queer, or a stubborn LGBTQ+ character is executed by the state to protect the status quo.

Films that examine homophobic or transphobic societies employ the BYG trope to highlight the harshness of those societies. Unfortunately, when an LGBTQ+ character is introduced in a film with an intolerant world, the viewer starts to anticipate that character's death. These characters are punished for refusing to conform to heteronormative societies.

A crime, in this case, murder, is classified as a hate crime when it is motivated by the offender's prejudice.<sup>275</sup> In other words, the offender commits violence against a specific victim based solely on an aspect of the victim's identity, in this case, sexuality and/ or gender identity. In the films *Brokeback Mountain* and *V for Vendetta*,<sup>276</sup> LGBTQ+ people are murdered. Their deaths are not

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<sup>275</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Hate crimes," FBI.gov, accessed November 9, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes>.

<sup>276</sup> *V for Vendetta*, directed by James McTeigue (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures) 2005.

prosecuted because the homophobic governments either agree with the murder or are themselves responsible for having the LGBTQ+ person executed.

In *Brokeback Mountain*, Jack is a cattle rancher who falls in love with his fellow rancher. His lover warns him to keep his sexuality hidden. After Jack refuses, the viewer begins to expect his inevitable death. These suspicions are confirmed when a group of homophobic cowboys later brutally murder Jack. His murder is covered up, and his death is treated as a car-related accident. In *V for Vendetta*, the journal of a woman called IV reveals that she is a prisoner of the state, arrested for being a lesbian in a world where SGD relations are illegal. Given that IV's cell is empty and the authoritarian government is still in power, the viewer suspects that IV must have died, even before her death is confirmed. In both films, the characters die off-screen because the plots are more concerned with how these deaths affect the surviving characters rather than the experiences of these hate-crime victims.

An LGBTQ+ character's death can be seen as a sacrifice if they are murdered to protect another character or the status quo. These characters' deaths are also sacrifices for the plot. In *Boys Don't Cry*,<sup>277</sup> Brandon, a transgender man, is the protagonist. The film centres on him hiding his sex in a transphobic society. Upon discovery, Brandon is assaulted and gang-raped by his supposed friends. The film ends with his murder, which seems inevitable – especially after his sex is revealed. Following Brandon's death, the film focuses on how his death affects his girlfriend. His death is only portrayed as being tragic due to how it affects her.

Since the 1980s, it has become common for side characters who are LGBTQ+ to contract an STD and die. Although AIDS affects all people, Hollywood films still primarily reserve the virus for LGBTQ+ characters and focus on the victims' surviving friends. Viewers are made to sympathise more with characters who lost friends rather than with those who lost their lives.

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<sup>277</sup> *Boys Don't Cry*, directed by Kimberly Pierce (USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures) 1999.

### 3.5.3 Natural World: AIDS

The final BYG trope is specific to Hollywood. In the 1980s and 1990s, the USA experienced the height of the AIDS epidemic. With the unknown virus seemingly only affecting gay men, the press dubbed it “gay cancer,”<sup>278</sup> and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) listed “male homosexuality” as one of the significant risk factors.<sup>279</sup> Following this, the American public assumed that this new deadly auto-immune disease only targeted gay men and adopted the belief best expressed in a 1986 *New York Times* editorial: “Don’t Panic, Yet, Over AIDS.”<sup>280</sup> Due to the country’s homophobic government, the state refused to support or fund research to develop treatments.<sup>281</sup> Between 1981 and 1995, at least 319 849 people died of AIDS in the USA.<sup>282</sup> The government abandoned an entire generation of gay men because it suited public interest.

In 1993, the film *Philadelphia*,<sup>283</sup> one of the first mainstream films to address the AIDS epidemic, was nominated for and won many Academy Awards and other film awards. Since then, many films have been released exploring the epidemic or featuring LGBTQ+ characters who die of AIDS. This practice made AIDS a BYG trope. LGBTQ+ people are still marginalised in the USA, and films that employ the AIDS BYG trope illustrate how Misery Porn operated. AIDS films, usually set in the 1980s, explore how homophobic the USA *used to be*. These films pretend that homophobia is a thing of the past and that the USA is now a discrimination-free country.

Some films that portray the AIDS epidemic are educational and not Misery Porn texts. These films depict the epidemic with the sole purpose of bringing the tragedy to light, like how Holocaust films keep the atrocities of World War II from being forgotten. Here, the BYG trope becomes tricky. Portraying historical horrors in films serves to educate people and publicly acknowledge that they

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<sup>278</sup> Kay Wright, “HIV AIDS a Timeline: 25 Years in the Life of the Disease in America,” *Essence*, 2006.

<sup>279</sup> Wright, “HIV AIDS a Timeline”.

<sup>280</sup> “Don’t Panic, Yet, Over AIDS,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 1986, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/07/opinion/don-t-panic-yet-over-aids.html>.

<sup>281</sup> Steven Epstein, “Activism, Drug Regulation, and the Politics of Therapeutic Evaluation in the AIDS Era: A Case Study of ddC and the ‘Surrogate Markers’ Debate,” *Social Studies of Science* 27, no.5 (1997), 691-726.

<sup>282</sup> AmfAR, “HIV/AIDS: Snapshots of an Epidemic,” The Foundation for AIDS Research, accessed October 22, 2020, <https://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/>.

<sup>283</sup> *Philadelphia*, Jonathan Demme, 1993.

occurred. On the other hand, appropriating a tragedy as a trope undermines these efforts. Some films that portray the AIDS epidemic are not guilty of employing the BYG trope.

The film *The Normal Heart*<sup>284</sup> was my first exposure to the impact that AIDS had on the gay community in the USA. As a South African, my education on HIV and AIDS was limited to how the pandemic impacted South Africa and other African countries. *The Normal Heart* focuses on the LGBTQ+ community and how regular USA citizens had to fund research and support dying friends and partners without government assistance. In the film, most of the LGBTQ+ characters die. Unlike *Philadelphia*, which tells the story of how a gay man died, *The Normal Heart* tells the story of how a group of death-marked gay men lived.

Films that portray the AIDS epidemic in the USA fall into the Bury Your Gays trope when their focus shifts away from the LGBTQ+ community. These films do not explore the tragic impact that the epidemic had on the community. They also underplay or ignore how the USA government let its citizens die because they believed the virus only killed gay people.

The films *Dallas Buyers Club*<sup>285</sup> and *Rent*<sup>286</sup> are both guilty of employing the BYG trope by using AIDS. In both films, LGBTQ+ characters die of AIDS, and their deaths are nothing more than plot points to help the viewer understand the stakes of the world, and these deaths inspire the heteronormative characters to work harder toward their own goals. *Dallas Buyers Club* explores a heteronormative man, Ron's experience of living with AIDS in the 1980s. When his transgender friend, Rayon, dies of AIDS, Rayon's death inspires Ron to try harder to acquire illegal anti-viral drugs. Rayon's death is nothing more than an inevitable plot point. In *Rent*, Angel is a transgender Manic Pixie Dream Girl stereotype<sup>287</sup> who exists to lift the other characters' moods. She dies of AIDS. Instead of portraying the disinterested US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or USA government as the reason for Angel's death, *Rent* villainises gentrification – which mainly affects

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<sup>285</sup> *Dallas Buyers Club*. Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée (USA: Focus Features) 2013.

<sup>286</sup> *Rent*, directed by Chris Columbus (USA: Sony Pictures Releasing) 2005.

<sup>287</sup> Nathan Rabin, who coined the term, describes the Manic Pixie Dream Girl as that bubbly, shallow cinematic creature “that exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures.” Nathan Rabin, “I’m Sorry for Coining the Phrase ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl,’” *Salon*, July 15, 2014, [https://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/im\\_sorry\\_for\\_coining\\_the\\_phrase\\_manic\\_pixie\\_dream\\_girl/](https://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/im_sorry_for_coining_the_phrase_manic_pixie_dream_girl/).

the heteronormative white characters. On the other hand, Angels' death is a minor plot point to show how poverty could be deadly. After her death, her memory serves to inspire the other more central characters to improve themselves.

The Bury Your Gays trope is the darkest and the most damaging of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. BYG normalises the deaths of LGBTQ+ people by presenting these deaths as inevitable tragedies that the surviving friends will learn to live with. The victims of the BYG trope die after being rejected for their sexual orientations or gender identities. Suicide follows a rejection from the character's Internal World, Purge is a result of rejection from their Social World, and AIDS is a sign of a universal rejection by their Natural World. Most LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes portray LGBTQ+ people as caricatures who do not have to be taken seriously. In a step further, the BYG trope treats their deaths as insignificant events.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter offers a comprehensive discussion of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in Hollywood. There are, however, many more stereotypes and tropes that were not discussed in this chapter. As this dissertation focuses on the replication of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in South African films, this chapter was limited to the most prominent and those found in South African cinema or that are relevant to a South African context.

Most of these stereotypes and tropes have their roots in the 1934 Motion Picture Production Code and, although the Code has been defunct for over fifty years, its legacy still affects the depictions of LGBTQ+ people in Hollywood films. While one might argue that films are mere products of the entertainment industry, stories have always influenced the ways people view themselves and others – as discussed in Chapter 2.

The MDM and WDW stereotypes imply that SGD people's identities are rooted solely in their sexualities. By presenting SGD men as frail, cowardly, or hysterical lesser men, films create the impression that sexuality determines someone's inherent worth. Similarly, by presenting SGD women as either undesirable butch failed women or as promiscuous and confused women who

exist to be fetishized by men, films imply that there is something wrong with, or immoral about, SGD women.

The Queer Villains stereotypes create unfounded and harmful impressions about LGBTQ+ people. These stereotypes affect how LGBTQ+ people are seen and develop a sense of distrust in viewers. The Pity Your Gays and Bury Your Gays tropes, on the other hand, negatively affect how LGBTQ+ people view themselves. These tropes equate queerness with suffering and imply that being queer dramatically improves one's risk of an early or violent death.

These stereotypes and tropes are essential to understand because South African filmmakers have adopted and incorporated them. Chapter 4 explores how these five groups of stereotypes and tropes are applied in South African films. Most South African examples (in Chapter 4) mimic the Hollywood examples (in Chapter 3). This further shows to what extent South African filmmakers copy Hollywood films.



# Chapter 4:

## Hollywood Reproduced in South African Films

The stereotypes of gays and lesbians, which were examined in Russo's landmark book *The Celluloid Closet* (1987) unfortunately prevailed in most South African features.<sup>288</sup>

South Africa and the USA are continents apart, yet they share a similar history of racial segregation, conservatism, and the oppression of the LGBTQ+ community. Despite these similarities, the South African film industry does not share Hollywood's history of religious interventions and the subsequent Motion Picture Production Code that shaped Hollywood's depictions of LGBTQ+ characters. Nevertheless, SA's films are riddled with Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. Even though SA's film industry was not under the jurisdiction of Hollywood's Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) which enforced the Production Code, SA films inexplicably conform to the Code's restrictions.

In discussing the depictions of LGBTQ+ characters in South African films, I first define the terminology applicable to South African society and cinema. Thereafter, I explore the origins of the two different South African cinemas and identify recurring themes in South African films. Finally, I examine the replication for Hollywood LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in South African cinema. Chapter 4 mirrors Chapter 3 by reapplying the same five categories from the previous chapter to illustrate how South African films mimic Hollywood films. This section highlights five internationally significant South African queer films released within the last decade (2011-2021). The replication of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in these primary films emphasise

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<sup>288</sup> Botha, "The Representation of Gays", 1.

how deep Hollywood's influence is entrenched in the psyche of South African filmmakers. These films are (in chronological order): *Skoonheid*,<sup>289</sup> *Inxeba*,<sup>290</sup> *Kanarie*,<sup>291</sup> *Rafiki*,<sup>292</sup> and *Moffie*.<sup>293</sup>

To effectively discuss LGBTQ+ representation in South Africa, specific terms first need to be defined and clarified. The term "Afrikaner" refers to a white Afrikaans-speaking South African who identifies with conservative ideologies. The term "*boer*"<sup>294</sup> refers to a specific type of idolised Afrikaner man, a hyper-conservative, typically masculine, and overtly patriarchal Afrikaner man who lives in rural South Africa. The *boer* has become a film stereotype visually signified by his *vellie* shoes, khaki shirt and large bakkie. The term "moffie" is used to reinforce conservative ideologies and masculinities. It is applied pejoratively to men and boys who do not conform to a very narrow definition of masculinity.

In his thesis on the political impotence of Afrikaans films, Chris Broodryk – South African Film scholar – examines how Afrikaans cinema "emphasises an exaggerated tension between urban and rural spaces [... and] privileges rural spaces as environments for the actualisation of Afrikaans white male potential."<sup>295</sup> I refer to these preferential depictions of the *platteland*<sup>296</sup> – farmlands and small towns – as rural-philía. It refers to an obsessive romanticization, almost fetishization, of rural spaces – usually farms – accompanied by the vilification of urban spaces – usually major cities like Johannesburg.<sup>297</sup> Rural-philía also presents rural spaces as inherently masculine, heteronormative, and traditional and presents urban spaces as effeminate, queer, and immoral.<sup>298</sup>

Lastly, in his article on homophobic propaganda in African countries, Thabo Msibi – South African researcher – explores the myth of a "Sodomite-free Africa."<sup>299</sup> This is a colonial term used

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<sup>289</sup> *Skoonheid*, 2011.

<sup>290</sup> *Inxeba*, 2017.

<sup>291</sup> *Kanarie*, 2018.

<sup>292</sup> *Rafiki*, 2018.

<sup>293</sup> *Moffie*, 2019.

<sup>294</sup> Translated as "farmer."

<sup>295</sup> Chris Willem Broodryk, "Absences, Exclusivities and Utopias: Afrikaans Film as a Cinema of Political Impotence," (PHD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2015), 180-188.

<sup>296</sup> Translated to "countryside." I employ the term in accordance with Bothma. Bothma, "Hemel op die *Platteland*."

<sup>297</sup> Broodryk discusses this concept as a "fixation on rural retreat." Broodryk, "Absences, Exclusivities and Utopias," 11

<sup>298</sup> Bothma, "Hemel op die *Platteland*," 27-28.

<sup>299</sup> Thabo Msibi, "The Lies we have been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa," *Africa Today* 58, no. 1 (2011): 56.

by European ethnographers to influence the European public's opinions on Africa and "homosexuality."<sup>300</sup> The term refers to the myth of Africa as a "pure"<sup>301</sup> continent that is free from "sodomy."<sup>302</sup> The myth implies that SGD is something inherently un-African brought to South Africa by white Europeans instead of something that has been practised in South Africa from long before colonialism.<sup>303</sup>

South Africa's film industry is unique. The country's racially divided past led to the development of two distinctly different film industries,<sup>304</sup> which I refer to as Afrikaans Cinema and English-and-Vernacular (E-V) Cinema. For the purpose of this study, I define Afrikaans cinema as all films, conservative or not, that have Afrikaans as their primary language. Similarly, E-V cinema includes all South African-made films that have any language other than Afrikaans as their primary language.

During Apartheid, "[i]deology and capital came together to create a national cinema for whites only."<sup>305</sup> Afrikaans cinema was supported and controlled by the Apartheid government. Afrikaans filmmakers enjoyed state-subsidized film budgets with which they made relatively high-budget films for white Afrikaans film audiences to be screened in cinemas in the cities. These state-funded films were propaganda features used to promote Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaner nationalism has had homophobia as one of its fundamental ideologies. Botha attributes this to radical Christian and white supremacist ideals, which sought to "keep the white nation sexually and morally pure so that it had the strength to resist the black communist onslaught."<sup>306</sup> Most Christian-majority countries have used religion to support homophobic rhetoric and legislature, while racial purism is often linked with a sense of sexual purism.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Msibi, "The Lies we have been Told", 63.

<sup>301</sup> Msibi, "The Lies we have been Told," 62.

<sup>302</sup> In the context of Msibi's article, the term "sodomy" specifically refers to same-gender sexual intercourse. Msibi, "The Lies we have been Told," 62.

<sup>303</sup> Msibi, "The Lies we have been Told", 62-63.

<sup>304</sup> Martin P. Botha, "Homosexuality and South African Cinema," *Kinema* (2003): 3

<sup>305</sup> Botha, "Homosexuality and South African Cinema," 4.

<sup>306</sup> Botha, "Homosexuality and South African Cinema," 2.

<sup>307</sup> Botha, "The Representation of Gays", 2.

In its development, E-V cinema faced far more obstacles than Afrikaans cinema. Black filmmakers and filmmakers of colour had to rely on their own funds and resources to make low-production-value films<sup>308</sup> screened in churches, schools, and bars.<sup>309</sup> Unlike independent and alternative films in the USA, the South African independent films remained void of LGBTQ+ representations. Instead, these independent films focussed on other social issues like racial inequality and aimed at telling stories about black South Africans and South African people of colour.

Mainstream Afrikaans cinema has its roots in Apartheid, and many of the myths constructed during Apartheid persist in Afrikaans films. The level of control that the Apartheid government had in creating Afrikaans films becomes apparent when one considers the extent to which Apartheid-era South African filmmakers depicted SGD people in films. These depictions closely resemble Hollywood depictions from 1934-1961, under the Production Code.<sup>310</sup> During the peak of Afrikaner nationalism, “ideal” displays of manliness were found on the rugby field and in the military, which are arguably distinctly “macho” spaces. These constructs and characteristics were necessary for Apartheid ideology to project an image of the superiority and prosperity of white Afrikaner men to strengthen and legitimise its racist political agendas.<sup>311</sup> Similarly, Afrikaner characters were depicted according to “folk stereotypes that showed the Afrikaner as chatty, heart-warming and lovable.”<sup>312</sup>

Finally, both cinemas are rural-philic in their depictions of rural and urban spaces. Afrikaans cinema romanticizes farm life and depicts the city as an immoral and effeminate space. Although E-V films do not villainise cities as much as Afrikaans films, these films still present rural men as more masculine and purer than urban men. These depictions are seen in mainstream Afrikaans

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<sup>308</sup> Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 88.

<sup>309</sup> Botha, “Homosexuality and South African Cinema”, 3-6.

<sup>310</sup> Botha, “The Representation of Gays”1.

<sup>311</sup> Sonnekus, “We’re not Faggots!”, 24.

<sup>312</sup> Botha, “Homosexuality and South African Cinema”, 4.

films, like *Pad na jou Hart*,<sup>313</sup> and *Platteland*<sup>314</sup> and in E-V films, like *Mr. Bones*,<sup>315</sup> *Faith like Potatoes*<sup>316</sup> and *Mrs Right Guy*.<sup>317</sup>

In addition to creating and perpetuating the SA-specific myths, like rural-philias, the *boer*, and sodomite-free Africa, South African films also mimic Hollywood films and perpetuate US-specific myths about masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. These myths, usually through stereotypes and tropes, promote Afrikaner exceptionalism and African hyper-masculinity as dominant ideologies. Despite the decades that have elapsed since the fall of apartheid, stereotypes and tropes prevalent in South African films reveal how profit-driven storytelling becomes harmful. The South African film industry relies on audiences for profit which means that the films produced need to cater to the different South African audiences in order to achieve box-office success. Therefore, the prevalence of homophobic dichotomy in South African films reveal how homophobic South African film audiences are.

Chapter three catalogues and defines the five categories of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes most prevalent in Hollywood films. These categories and their subtypes are replicated in South African films – often in unique ways. The only exception is the AIDS Bury-Your-Gays trope. As discussed in 4.5, despite how prevalent HIV / AIDS are in SA, the virus is not depicted in South African films.

Five queer films have been produced by South African filmmakers in the last decade. Although these films received international acclaim, they are still relatively unknown by the general South African public. The five films also conform to the five stereotype and trope categories identified

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<sup>313</sup> *Pad na jou Hart (Road to your Heart)*, directed by Jaco Smit (SA: The Film Factory) 2014. An Afrikaans rip-off of the Hollywood film *The Ultimate Gift*, directed by Michael O. Sajbel, (USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 2007, about a corporate businessman's journey to discovering that what really matters is a simple monogamous life in the *Platteland*.

<sup>314</sup> *Platteland*, directed by Sean Else (SA: Philio Films Ltd) 2011. The film depicts the *platteland* as the rightful property of the *boer* – a space worth fighting for.

<sup>315</sup> *Mr. Bones*, directed by Gray Hofmeyr (SA: Videovision Entertainment) 2001. In the film an African tribal king sends a traditional medicine man, Leon Schuster in blackface, to return his son from the city to the *Platteland*.

<sup>316</sup> *Faith like Potatoes*, directed by Regardt van den Bergh (SA: Affirm Films) 2006. A religious film that centres around farm-life.

<sup>317</sup> *Mrs Right Guy*, directed by Adze Ugah, (SA: Netflix) 2016.

in Hollywood films. *Kanarie*<sup>318</sup> depicts characters that conform to the three Men-desiring-men stereotypes, *Rafiki*<sup>319</sup> is significant in its subversion of the three Women-desiring-women stereotypes, *Scoonheid*<sup>320</sup> depicts a Queer Villain in the form of a Queer Predator, *Moffie*<sup>321</sup> employs all three of the Pity Your Gays tropes, and *Inxeba*<sup>322</sup> employs the Purge incarnation of the Bury Your Gays Trope.

This section explores how South African films replicate Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. The structure mirrors that of Chapter three. In every category, I first examine how the versions of the respective stereotypes and tropes are used in various South African films. Then the five primary films – the South African queer-films – are analysed and discussed in terms of how they conform to and subvert Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

## 4.1 Men-Desiring Men Stereotypes

The Men-desiring men (MDM) stereotypes created in Hollywood films usually consist of comedic lesser men who assist the more central characters or make the plot more interesting. Of the three stereotypes, the Pansy and the Sissy are used far less often than the Queen in South African films. Certain mainstream South African films do not only copy Hollywood MDM stereotypes, but they also copy entire storylines. This section first explores how the three stereotypes are employed in a variety of South African films. Thereafter, the main discussion focuses on this section's primary film, *Kanarie*, which features all three of Hollywood's MDM stereotypes.

### 4.1.1 South Africa's Pansies, Sissies, and Queens.

Hollywood's original Pansy, Algie, from *Algie, the Miner*, is reproduced in Afrikaans films like *Bakgat!*.<sup>323</sup> Wimpie, the protagonist of *Bakgat!*, is a stereotypical Pansy, a nerdy lesser-man who

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<sup>318</sup> *Kanarie (Canary)*, directed by Christiaan Olwagen, 2018.

<sup>319</sup> *Rafiki (Friend)*, directed by Wanuri Kahiu, 2018.

<sup>320</sup> *Scoonheid (Beauty)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus, 2011

<sup>321</sup> *Moffie (Faggot)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus, 2019.

<sup>322</sup> *Inxeba (The Wound)*, directed by John Trengove, 2017.

<sup>323</sup> *Bakgat! (Great!)*, directed by Henk Pretorius (SA: Ster-Kinekor Pictures) 2008.

the brawnier men in school bully. To become a more acceptable man, he undergoes intense training and performs physical labour on a farm. The film follows Wimpie's journey as he transforms from a Pansy into a type of alpha-man by becoming the most popular boy in school who excels in masculine activities like rugby. Like Algie, Wimpie must learn to perform the "correct" type of masculinity before being accepted by his peers.

Sissy impersonators, like *Pillow Talk*'s Brad, reappear in Afrikaans films like *Semi-Soet*.<sup>324</sup> Hertjie, a side character, pretends to be his friend's gay manager. Hertjie conforms to the Sissy stereotype as an effeminate coward. He dresses in frilly clothes, uses dainty hand gestures, and screams in a high-pitched voice when he is frightened. Like Brad, Hertjie finally admits that he is not really gay to be with the woman he is in love with.

Whereas Hollywood has different incarnations of the Queen stereotype, South Africa tends to focus on the Gay-Best-Friend (GBF) Queen. However, the Afrikaans film *Susters*<sup>325</sup> depicts a drag queen character who does not conform to Hollywood's assumptions of drag queens – as overdramatic GBFs who do not exist beyond their drag personas. In the film, the three protagonists see a drag queen perform in a small pub. The one sister, Cecile, goes backstage and talks to the drag queen, who remains in character during the discussion. However, when the sisters enter the police station the next day, Cecile recognises the police chief as the drag queen from the previous night. She goes to confront him, planning to threaten him by exposing his supposed secret. However, he does not react in shame, and it becomes clear that his drag persona is neither a secret nor something that he is ashamed of. He and his community consider his drag persona as a character that he portrays – drag as a performative art. The police chief is a respectable man in the community, and the film makes no assumptions about his sexuality based on his hobby. The character of the police chief is based on real-life drag queens, instead of Hollywood drag caricatures. This makes him one of the only non-stereotypical LGBTQ+ characters in films.

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<sup>324</sup> *Semi-Soet (Semi-Sweet)*, directed by Joshua Rous (SA: Nu Metro) 2012.

<sup>325</sup> *Susters (Sisters)*, directed by Corne van Rooyen (SA: Inhoud Huis Media) 2018.

Just as GBF Queens, like Damien from *Mean Girls*, are popular plot devices in Hollywood films, GBFs have become a staple in South African films. Afrikaans films like *Liefeling*<sup>326</sup> and E-V films like *Mrs Right Guy*<sup>327</sup> feature GBF Queens. In *Liefeling*, the heroine, Liefeling, has a GBF, Duppie, who also happens to be in a wheelchair.<sup>328</sup> Duppie's life centres around Liefeling, and he has no desires or ambitions beyond assisting her. Duppie is a bland and overtly harmless assistant who offers nothing more to the plot than supporting Liefeling. In *Mrs Right Guy*, Thabang is Gugu, the protagonist's, best friend. Just like Damien, Thabang follows Gugu around and even waits for her in the women's bathroom. Thabang's character is shallow. He is nothing more than a comedic and loyal sidekick who is ready to jump whenever Gugu needs him.

As the exaggerated ultra-feminine entertainer, the Queen is usually an important side character designed to make the film more entertaining. South African films depict a variety of Queen characters, stemming back to Apartheid-era films. During Apartheid, Queens like *Lipstiek Dipstiek's*<sup>329</sup> "ontvangs moffie"<sup>330</sup> were popular in Afrikaans films. These Queens were yardstick characters whose effeminate gestures were more exaggerated than Hollywood Queens. Due to how well the South African Queen's effeminacy complemented the traditionally masculine hero's virility, the Apartheid-era censorship bodies allowed the character to persist.

More recent films, like *Jimmy in Pienk*<sup>331</sup> and *Pretville*,<sup>332</sup> apply the same Queen stereotype according to a set formula, often using the same actor, like Terence Bridgette. In *Jimmy in Pienk* and *Pretville*, Bridgette portrays Bunny and Pierre Lukuveer, respectively. The Queens illustrated by Bridgette, and other type-cast actors, are dainty men with silly names, pouting lips, and a tendency to be melodramatic. They avoid conflict and remain focussed on more trivial things, like a hairdressing competition, while the plot focuses on more pressing matters, like a

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<sup>326</sup> *Liefeling (Beloved) (die Movie)*, directed by Brian Webber (SA: Indigenous Film Distribution) 2010.

<sup>327</sup> *Mrs Right Guy*, directed by Asze Ugah, 2016.

<sup>328</sup> Duppie embodies the Other as the only disabled and the only queer character in a film filled with athletic heteronormative characters.

<sup>329</sup> *Lipstiek Dipstiek (Lipstick Dipstick)*, directed by Willie Esterhuizen (SA: Westel Produksies) 1994.

<sup>330</sup> "Reception faggot." *Lipstiek Dipstiek*, 1994.

<sup>331</sup> *Jimmy in Pienk (Jimmy in Pink)*, directed by Hanneke Schutte (SA: Light and Dark Films) 2013.

<sup>332</sup> *Pretville*, directed by Linda Korsten (SA: Hartiwood Films) 2012.



kidnapped family.<sup>333</sup> Most South African films feature only one MDM stereotypical character. *Kanarie*, by contrast, depicts all three MDM stereotypes.

### 4.1.2 *Kanarie*'s Stereotypes and Tropes.

*Kanarie*<sup>334</sup> was released in 2018 and employs all three of Hollywood's MDM stereotypes. *Kanarie* explores Afrikaner identity at the height of Afrikaner nationalism during the Border War. It is a coming-of-age film, marketed as a musical-war-drama. It follows a young man's journey to accepting his own identity as an SGD man in a homophobic society. The name "Kanarie" (Canary) refers to the South African Defence Force's (SADF) church choir. Johan Niemand, the protagonist, considers himself lucky when accepted into the Kanaries as it offers him a safe alternative to serving active duty on the border.

The film opens with the image of Johan in a woman's wedding dress. Here, the film employs queer-coding because the scene plays into Freudian ideations discussed in chapter 2, wherein Freud equates gendered behaviours with sexualities. Freud assumes that gender behaviour and sexuality are linked, meaning that, according to him, all people who find men attractive are feminine. Long before kissing Wolfgang, Johan's eventual love interest, the viewer already knows, or at least suspects, that Johan finds men attractive because *Kanarie* conflates cross-dressing with same-gender attraction.

Johan's character arc concerns his struggle for self-acceptance. Despite being a white Afrikaans-speaking man, in a system designed to benefit white Afrikaner men, he feels isolated from the rest of Afrikaner society. His isolation is visualised in fantasy sequences wherein Johan imagines a more fantastic gender-fluid world atop his bland heteronormative reality. In the opening sequence, Johan enters his fantasy world for the first time. He is in complete drag, with long hair and exaggerated make-up,<sup>335</sup> and lip-synchs. The music represents an alternative to restrictive Afrikaner

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<sup>333</sup> As seen in *Jimmy in Pienk*, 2013.

<sup>334</sup> *Kanarie (Canary)*, directed by Christiaan Olwagen, 2018.

<sup>335</sup> Johan resembles Boy George in the music video of the song *Karma Chameleon*. Culture Club, *Karma Chameleon*, directed by Peter Sinclair (1983), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmcA9LIIXWw&ab\\_channel=CultureClubVEVO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmcA9LIIXWw&ab_channel=CultureClubVEVO).

culture at a time of cultural sanctions. Johan's fantasies offer insights into Johan's journey of self-discovery and the New Wave subculture he identifies with. Furthermore, these scenes explore the androgynous style that this subculture gave rise to.

The opening fantasy scene shows other boys who embrace their true identities as presumably part of the LGBTQ+ community. Despite being a considerably progressive scene, it still plays into cliché expectations associated with SGD men. There is a ballerina, a pianist, and a florist – all hobbies and professions associated with femininity. The scene signifies the shelter that marginalised LGBTQ+ South Africans found in music at the time. However, and troublingly, it presents SGD boys and men as feminine (like Sissies) to communicate to viewers that these characters are queer.

Similarly, in a later scene, a woman assumes that Johan would want to try on a dress. While it can be argued that she figured out that he is an SGD man, Johan never indicated to her that he has an interest in fashion or in wearing women's clothes. The woman assumes these things and pressures Johan to put on a dress. Like the white-saviour trope found in Hollywood films, this woman becomes a type of straight-saviour: a heteronormative character who helps an otherwise helpless queer character accept themselves.

There are a series of minor issues and implications that collectively make *Kanarie* a somewhat conservative and even regressive queer film. The men fighting in the military see the Kanaries as “moffies”<sup>336</sup> and cowards. The film confirms these assumptions because two of the Kanaries (Johan and Wolfgang) are SGD men. Additionally, Johan and Ludolph, a fellow Kanarie, conform to MDM stereotypes. Johan conforms to aspects of the Pansy and the Sissy, and Ludolph plays into the Queen stereotype. Johan, like the Pansy, is a physically weak man who overthinks. His approach to solving conflict is debate or dialogue, and he speaks in a nagging voice. Additionally, similar to the Sissy, Johan dresses in women's clothes and, as a Kanarie, he is seen to “*gyppo [...] die army*”<sup>337</sup> and, by extension, is a coward. Ludolph is a bright-eyed, naïve, and overtly effeminate character who talks with the familiar sing-song voice of Hollywood Queens. He is a

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<sup>336</sup> *Kanarie*, 2018.

<sup>337</sup> “Avoids serving in the army.” In the film, a fellow soldier says this to Johan. *Kanarie*, 2018.

“momma’s boy” who avoids conflict and is a classical music expert. Ludolph and Johan are also most often called “moffies.”

While *Kanarie* conforms to MDM stereotypes, it does not play into more damaging tropes. The No-Happy Endings Pity Your Gays trope has created the expectation that LGBTQ+ lovers will not live happily ever after. However, *Kanarie* subverts this expectation and, in the process, becomes one of the only South African films to tell an LGBTQ+ love story where the lovers end up together. Throughout the film, Johan keeps a photo of Boy George<sup>338</sup> in his bible. This picture comes to represent his journey to self-acceptance. To signify the start of Johan’s downward spiral, he tears up Boy George’s picture – which symbolises self-rejection. At the end of the film, as Wolfgang leaves, and it seems that the two lovers will follow in the tradition of PYG queer couples, Johan reveals that he has reassembled Boy George’s photo. This signifies the completion of his character development. Johan has accepted himself and, more importantly, his sexuality. The film ends with Johan calling after Wolfgang, implying that the two men will reunite as lovers.

Here lies the importance of *Kanarie*. In a film industry devoid of LGBTQ+ representation, *Kanarie* offers two complex LGBTQ+ characters, Johan and Wolfgang. Even more significantly, the film provides a queer love story with a happy ending. Despite depicting SGD and otherwise gentler men according to Hollywood’s MDM stereotypes, *Kanarie* offers meaningful representations. Johan is a complex and compelling protagonist on a journey to self-acceptance who finds love in the process.

## 4.2 Women-desiring Women Stereotypes.

Women-desiring women (WDW) characters in Hollywood are far less common than MDM characters, and this imbalance is even worse in South African films. Both industries tend to focus on men’s experiences – usually white men – and neglect the experience of women. Unlike Hollywood, which employs the Dyke, Tomboy, and Lesbian-Chic WDW stereotypes, South

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<sup>338</sup> A famous gender-fluid singer-songwriter and a queer icon of the 1980s.

African films predominantly feature the Tomboy stereotype. This section first explores how the three stereotypes are used in a variety of South African films. Thereafter, the main discussion focuses on this section's primary film, *Rafiki*, which features almost none of these stereotypes.

#### 4.2.1 South Africa's Dykes, Tomboys, and Lesbian-Chics.

In searching for WDW characters in South African films, only a few Dyke and Lesbian-Chic examples could be found. *Hoofmeisie*<sup>339</sup> features one of South Africa's only Dyke characters. In the film, Hetwieg Karolus is described as a "butch bulldog."<sup>340</sup> She is the only black girl in the school and embodies the traditional Dyke stereotype as a physically strong girl who bullies the other girls.<sup>341</sup> Similar to the Dyke prison-warden from *Caged*, Hetwieg terrorises the other girl characters and juxtaposes the film's traditionally feminine protagonist.

The Lesbian-Chic stereotype is slightly more common in South Africa than the Dyke. However, Lesbian-Chic is applied differently than in Hollywood. Whereas Hollywood's Lesbian-Chic characters are usually lesbian or bisexual women, South Africa's Lesbian-Chics are reserved for peripheral characters. They are assumed-straight women who kiss or touch each other for the explicit purpose of arousing men. This is most often seen in comedies that cater to men, such as *Bakgat! Tot die mag 3*.<sup>342</sup> In the film, Japie, a side character, works at a children's party. He becomes aroused when he sees two women in the swimming pool kiss each other. Upon seeing that he is aroused in front of children, his employer fires him. In minor scenes, such as this example, women's sexualities are fetishized and used to achieve a specific plot goal.

The Tomboy WDW stereotype is far more common in South Africa than the Dyke and Lesbian-Chic stereotypes. One of these Tomboys is seen in *The World Unseen*.<sup>343</sup> Amina, the film's protagonist, is a Tomboy who falls in love with another woman. She conforms to the stereotype as she is friends with men, performs traditionally masculine activities like physical labour, and

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<sup>339</sup> *Hoofmeisie* directed by Morné du Toit (SA: The Film Factory) 2011.

<sup>340</sup> *Hoofmeisie* 2011.

<sup>341</sup> Like Duppie in *Liefeling*, Hetwieg also becomes the embodiment of the other as the only black student and the only queer-coded character in the film.

<sup>342</sup> *Bakgat! Tot die mag 3 (Great! Cubed)*, directed by Stefan Nieuwoudt (SA: Dark Matter Studios) 2013.

<sup>343</sup> *The World Unseen*, directed by Shamim Sarif (SA: Enlightenment Productions) 2007.

wears pants in a setting where women are expected to wear dresses.<sup>344</sup> In addition to being a Tomboy stereotype, she is also a lesbian character who is fetishized on screen. Amina falls victim to the male gaze as the camera lingers on Amina's body as she dresses and undresses.

In South African cinema, SGD women are almost exclusively found in E-V films, like *The World Unseen*, *While You Weren't Looking*,<sup>345</sup> and *Quest for Love*.<sup>346</sup> Unlike *The World Unseen*, the films *While You Weren't Looking* and *Quest for Love* are inaccessible South African WDW films. *While You Weren't Looking* might feature all three or none of the WDW stereotypes. Unfortunately, despite countless efforts, I have been unable to obtain access to the film. I must, therefore, exclude it from the scope of this paper. The 1988 film *Quest for Love* centres around the relationship between two SGD women. Most of the film, however, depicts the heroine in a heteronormative relationship with a man. When the two women lovers are finally reunited, the intimate scenes are visually awkward. Instead of kissing, the women bizarrely rub their closed-mouthed faces together.<sup>347</sup> The film had been relevant at a time but, as an outdated and inaccessible film, *Quest for Love* can hardly be considered a meaningful South African queer film anymore.

#### 4.2.2 Rafiki's Stereotypes and Tropes.

Due to South Africa's significant lack of WDW films, the leading film for this section is a Kenyan-made film with a South African co-writer. *Rafiki*<sup>348</sup> is directed by a Kenyan woman and co-written by Jenna Cato Bass – a South African screenwriter. It tells the story of two young Kenyan women, Kena and Ziki, who fall in love despite the ban on SGD relationships in their country.

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<sup>344</sup> The film is set in 1950s South Africa.

<sup>345</sup> *While you weren't Looking*, directed by Catherine Stewart (SA: Out in Africa) 2015.

<sup>346</sup> *Quest for Love*, directed by Helena Nogueira (SA: Distant Horizon) 1988.

<sup>347</sup> This was most likely due to apartheid-era censorship regulations, but still, these scenes are more uncanny than romantic.

<sup>348</sup> *Rafiki (Friend)*, directed by Wanuri Kahiu (Kenya: Big World Cinema) 2018.

*Rafiki* is a modern-day *Romeo and Juliet*<sup>349</sup> story placed in an African context. The play, *Romeo and Juliet*, is so ingrained in the public consciousness that texts need only mention one of the two lovers' names to evoke an understanding of passionate love. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Montagues (Romeo's family) and the Capulets (Juliet's family) are caught in an endless conflict and struggle for power. Similarly, in *Rafiki*, John Mwaura (Kena's father) and Peter Okemi (Ziki's father) are political rivals running for the same position. Because of these conflicts, Romeo and Juliet, and Kena and Ziki, are forbidden from seeing each other. Despite their families' wishes, the star-crossed lovers meet, fall in love, and develop intimate relationships. Their communities find out, and they are torn apart. Yet, they persist and go to great extremes to be together. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet fakes her death, leading to the play's tragic double-suicide ending. In *Rafiki*, however, the lovers bide their time. Ziki is sent abroad while Kena pursues her dream of becoming a doctor. Years later, when they find themselves free from their families and their communities' restrictions, they find each other and live happily ever after. *Rafiki* subverts *Romeo and Juliet*'s plot in only one respect: in *Rafiki*, the lovers and their love survive.

Kena, *Rafiki*'s protagonist, conforms to elements of the Tomboy stereotype. She is friends with a group of boys; she dresses in loose-fitting boyish clothes, wears her hair short, and plays soccer – usually as the only girl on the field. Despite this, Kena subverts the Tomboy stereotype in that the men recognise her as a viable dating partner. Her friend, Blacksta, actively pursues her, and he is angry when she rejects him. Only the older community members see Kena as a faulty woman and criticise her for refusing to perform traditionally feminine behaviours.

Ziki, on the other hand, is a celebration of femininity. She does not conform to any stereotypes. She is strong, stubborn, and free-thinking. Ziki dresses in her style with long colourful hair and rainbow-coloured nails. She dances in the streets and openly pursues Kena. Ziki stands in contrast to the rest of the town. She does not partake in gossip, nor is she bothered by it. The town's intimidation tactics fail to work on her. As SGD characters, Kena and Ziki are compelling protagonists and positive LGBTQ+ role models.

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<sup>349</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, playwright by William Shakespeare, 1597.

When comparing *Rafiki* to international cinema, the film becomes even more powerful. It is hard to find any other film that depicts SGD-women and love in a celebratory and complex way. *Disobedience*<sup>350</sup> and *Below her Mouth*<sup>351</sup> both portray the WDW relationships as secret love affairs, wherein one of the lovers is unfaithful to her fiancé, and the central lovers do not end up together. Although *DEBS*<sup>352</sup> and *My Days of Mercy*<sup>353</sup> present the central lovers ending up together, their relationships start with infidelity, perpetuating the myth that SGD people are unfaithful and selfish.

Furthermore, *Carol*<sup>354</sup> ends with the two central lovers smiling at each other, suggesting a happy ending. However, the sex scenes fetishize the women's bodies and resemble heterosexual sex scenes designed to cater to the male gaze. This is not surprising considering that the film's director and cinematographer were both men, and the film was produced by The Weinstein Company.<sup>355</sup> *Duck Butter*<sup>356</sup> and *La Vie d'Adèle*<sup>357</sup> both portray explicit sex scenes that do not conform to the male gaze and focus on the women's sexual pleasure instead. However, the central relationships fall apart in both films due to mental instability and infidelity, respectively.

These internationally acclaimed queer films all offer beautiful love stories. Still, none are as wholesome, positive, devoid of stereotypes and with a happy ending as the compelling love story told by *Rafiki*. Unfortunately, *Rafiki* is an exception, as the only film in this chapter that does not conform to any harmful LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

### 4.3 Queer Villains Stereotypes

Queer Villains range from comedic antagonists to terrifying fiends and are found in Hollywood and South African films. Queer-Coded Villains are lesser villains with queer qualities, which conform to SGD stereotypes and serve comedic purposes. Queer Predators and Queer Killers, on

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<sup>350</sup> *Disobedience*, Sebastian Lelio (USA: Bleecker Street) 2017.

<sup>351</sup> *Below her Mouth*, April Mullen (Canada: Gunpowder and Sky) 2016.

<sup>352</sup> *DEBS*, directed by Angela Robinson (USA: Samuel Goldwyn Films) 2004.

<sup>353</sup> *My Days of Mercy*, directed by Tali Shalom Ezer (USA: Lionsgate) 2017.

<sup>354</sup> *Carol*, directed by Todd Haynes (USA: The Weinstein Company) 2015.

<sup>355</sup> Harvey Weinstein, a founder of The Weinstein Company, is a convicted sex offender.

<sup>356</sup> *Duck Butter*, directed by Miguel Arteta (USA: The Orchard) 2018.

<sup>357</sup> *La Vie d'Adèle (Blue is the Warmest Colour)*, directed by Abdellatif Kechiche (France: Wild Bunch) 2013.

the other hand, are twisted characters. Their queerness is conflated with wickedness and is presented as the core aspect, or driver, of their villainy. This section first explores how the three stereotypes are employed in a variety of South African films. Thereafter, the main discussion focuses on this section's primary film, *Skoonheid*, which features a Queer Predator.

### 4.3.1 South Africa's Queer-Coded Villains, Queer Predators, and Queer Killers

Unlike Hollywood, South African films do not feature Queer-Coded Villains. The main reason is that the sexualities and gender identities of villains in South African films are seldom ambiguous. They are either explicitly LGBTQ+ or heteronormative, as opposed to Hollywood films – where queer characteristics are often bestowed upon villains without addressing their sexualities.

South Africa's closest resemblance to a Hollywood-style Queer Coded Villain is when Queer Villains are presented as comedic. Gerhárd and Stéphán in *Thys en Trix*<sup>358</sup> are introduced as a cliché SGD couple. Both men have eccentric names and conform to the Queen MDM stereotype. They are revealed to be the film's villains as two, apparently heterosexual, men pretending to be Queens and are only posing as a couple – Queer-Coded Villains. However, toward the end of the film, both men confess their love, making them an SGD couple – Queer Villains. After Gerhárd and Stéphán are defeated, they are revealed to be lesser villains working for a superior main villain. Therefore, *Thys en Trix* both employs and subverts the Queer-Coded-Villains stereotype.

Queer-Predators, on the other hand, are far more common in South African films. Comedies like *Bakgat!* and *Lipstiek Dipstiek* feature skinny, presumably SGD men, who behave in sexually inappropriate ways toward the films' protagonists. *Bakgat!* features a rugby nurse who flirts with the protagonist, Wimpie, and calls him "sout boudjies"<sup>359</sup> while removing coarse salt bullets from Wimpie's buttocks. His predatory behaviour makes Wimpie uncomfortable, and the film implies that SGD men, like this nurse, cannot control their urges around other men – even in a

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<sup>358</sup> *Thys en Trix (Thys and Trix)*, directed by Quentin Krog (SA: The Film Factory) 2018.

<sup>359</sup> "Salty Bums." *Bakgat!*, 2008.



professional setting. *Lipstiek Dipstiek's* Queer Predator is far more problematic. The protagonist, Poenie, is court-ordered to visit a priest. This priest, however, is an SGD sexual predator who tries to force Poenie into a sexual interaction, which is, essentially, an attempted sexual assault. When the priest strips, he is shown to be wearing lacy women's lingerie beneath his priest's robes. After Poenie escapes, the priest falsely accuses Poenie of sexual assault, which almost ruins Poenie's life. *Lipstiek Dipstiek's* priest character conflates queerness with deviancy: he is a sexual predator who abuses his position in the community to prey on young men.

Queer-Killers are less common than Queer-Predators but are still found in South African films. The films *Die Ontwaking*<sup>360</sup> and *Girl from Nowhere*<sup>361</sup> serve as examples. *Die Ontwaking* is an unpolished collage of three iconic Hollywood horror movies: *Psycho*,<sup>362</sup> *The Silence of the Lambs*,<sup>363</sup> and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.<sup>364</sup> The film even gives the serial killer the unoriginal moniker: the "Night Stalker."<sup>365</sup> *Girl from Nowhere* also copies an iconic Hollywood villain by featuring a femme-fatale bisexual killer likened to Catherine from *Basic Instinct*.

Abel, the killer in *Die Ontwaking*, is a socially awkward character. He qualifies as a Queer Killer because he conforms to the Pansy stereotype – he is intelligent, scared of confrontation, and has dainty hand gestures. Moreover, his character is a combination of the two most infamous Queer Killers: Norman Bates from *Psycho* and Buffalo Bill from *The Silence of the Lambs*. Like Norman, Abel is a momma's boy who preserves and talks to his dead mother's corpse. In addition, Abel is a recluse who kidnaps women and kills them to skin them, just like Buffalo Bill. The film's ending also copies *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* when Abel kills the lead detective's boyfriend, skins his head, and makes a mask for himself from his victim's face. Abel, a Queer Killer, is arguably South African cinema's most deranged killer, mainly because his character is based on iconic horror villains.

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<sup>360</sup> *Die Ontwaking (The Awakening)*, directed by Johnny Breedt (SA: Enigma Pictures) 2015.

<sup>361</sup> *Girl from Nowhere*, directed by Mark Jackson (SA: Jacksonfilm) 2017.

<sup>362</sup> *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (USA: Paramount Pictures) 1960.

<sup>363</sup> *The Silence of the Lambs*, directed by Jonathan Demme (USA: Orion Pictures) 1991.

<sup>364</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, directed by Tobe Hooper (USA: Bryanston Distributing Company) 1974.

<sup>365</sup> Two of the USA's most famous serial killers were named the "Night Stalker," Richard Ramirez and Joseph J. DeAngelo – better known as the Original Night Stalker, the Golden State Killer and the East Area Rapist.

*Girl from Nowhere* focuses on a couple, Hugh and Kate, who pick up a hitchhiker, Liza. Liza is a Lesbian-Chic character who flirts with both halves of the couple. She seduces Kate and drives a wedge between the couple. Liza copies Catherine from *Basic Instinct*'s murder modus operandi of killing men during sexual intercourse. While having sex with Hugh, Liza puts a gun against his head and kills him. *Girl from Nowhere* depicts queer women as sexual seductresses who are not beyond killing men to satisfy their desires. Unlike the unoriginal Queer Villains from *Die Ontwaking* and *Girl from Nowhere*, this section's primary film, *Skoonheid*, features an originally South African Queer Predator.

### 4.3.2 *Skoonheid*'s Stereotypes and Tropes

*Skoonheid*<sup>366</sup> was released in 2011 – half a decade before the rest of my primary films. The film's release date is significant because, in 2011, *Skoonheid* was one of the first queer films in South African cinema. The film's protagonist, François, is a closeted SGD man turned Queer Predator when he brutally rapes Christian, his best friend's son. François is one of South Africa's first SGD protagonists, which makes it all the more troubling that he conforms to a damaging Hollywood stereotype.

*Skoonheid* is South Africa's first Afrikaans film nominated for an Academy Award and the first Afrikaans film to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival.<sup>367</sup> However, the film is still relatively unknown by the general South African public and is considerably inaccessible. Unlike *Boetie*, *Gaan Border Toe!* and *Lipstiek Dipstiek*, *Skoonheid* is not available on any streaming sites. One wonders why an award-winning film<sup>368</sup> is harder to come by than an Apartheid-era propaganda film and a Willie Esterhuizen smut film. Chris Broodryk explains that Afrikaans film audiences have been raised in what he calls "a cinema of political impotence, a cinema devoid of a political voice."<sup>369</sup> Furthermore, Martin Botha explains that Afrikaans films must reflect a conservative

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<sup>366</sup> *Skoonheid (Beauty)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus (SA: Swift Productions) 2011.

<sup>367</sup> Mandy de Waal. "Skoonheid – a film that confronts truth, both beautiful and ugly." *Daily Maverick*. 2011. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2011-07-24-skoonheid-a-film-that-confronts-truths-both-beautiful-and-ugly/>.

<sup>368</sup> Winner of the Queer Palm award at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.

<sup>369</sup> Broodryk, "Absences, Exclusivities and Utopias," 1.

ideology to achieve monetary success in South Africa.<sup>370</sup> As South African conservatism is greatly homophobic, South African filmmakers that wish to achieve monetary success seem to opt for reproducing homophobic stereotypes and tropes. I would argue that South African film distribution companies – aware of what types of films are most attractive to South African viewers – simply do not prioritise thought-provoking films, like *Skoonheid*, and instead focus on distributing films about “romantic road trips as a negation of political accountability.”<sup>371</sup>

*Skoonheid* explores a community of closeted SGD men in rural South Africa who habitually engage in sexual intercourse. The film centres on François, who externally conforms to the myth of the ideal Afrikaner man while internally harbouring romantic feelings for Christian. François’ feelings develop from an infatuation to a violent obsession. He goes to extreme lengths to get Christian alone – he stalks Christian, gets his daughter arrested, and finally tricks Christian into feeling safe with him. François’ obsession builds to a breaking point when he brutally rapes Christian in the most violent rape scene in Afrikaans cinema. This rape instantly transforms François from a tragic character to a disturbing Queer Villain.

François does not conform to any MDM stereotypes and, on the contrary, he embodies traditional Afrikaner masculinity. He is the patriarch of his family, with a typical masculine career, physically large, speaks in a deep voice, and drives a large bakkie. Despite being a vocal homophobe, making statements like “you never know with these *moffies*,”<sup>372</sup> François partakes in men-only orgies regularly.

François tries to satisfy his oppressed sexual desires by sleeping with other “white, ‘masculine’ and ‘straight’ men.”<sup>373</sup> Instead of being an example of queer representation, these self-proclaimed “not *moffies*”<sup>374</sup> view themselves as heterosexual men who just happen to have sex with each other. They impose their own set of secretive and repressive rules. They all dress in

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<sup>370</sup> Botha, “The Representation of Gays,” 2013.

<sup>371</sup> Broodryk, “Absences, Exclusivities and Utopias,” 6.

<sup>372</sup> Although the word “*moffie*” can be translated as “faggot,” the film refers to an Afrikaner man’s specific understanding of SGD men. *Skoonheid*, 2011.

<sup>373</sup> Grant Andrews, “The Boundaries of Desire and Intimacy in Post-Apartheid South African Queer Film: Oliver Hermanus’s *Skoonheid*,” *Image & Text*, no. 31 (2018): 36.

<sup>374</sup> François angrily exclaims “*ons is nie moffies nie!*” (“We’re not faggots!”) when one of the men suggest that the group allow a more stereotypical SGD man participate in the orgy. *Skoonheid*, 2011.

two-tone khakis, drink beer, and act and speak with a signature *boere* machismo. The men have internalised homophobia and equate SGD-identities with stereotypical effeminate mannerisms and outfits. They separate sexual orientation from sexual actions. Because of this, the orgy scene is void of eroticism. The cinematography gives the scene a disconnected and formal atmosphere, like a chore the men must tick off the agenda. This shows how homophobic SGD men, like François, ultimately deny themselves intimate gratification, even while physically engaging in sexual acts with their desired partners, for fear of being “*moffies*.”<sup>375</sup>

Throughout the film, François’ behaviour escalates. He lies to his wife, family, and friends, exhibits stalking behaviour when he follows Christian to Cape Town and betrays his daughter when he calls the police and reports the car that she borrowed as stolen. The film presents these cruel actions as driven by his obsession with another man – blaming his sexuality for his selfish and inappropriate behaviours. François gets Christian alone in his hotel room, where he tries to kiss Christian. When Christian rejects his advances, François suddenly transforms, and he becomes angry and violent as he overpowers Christian and rapes him.

In a single scene, François’ complex character is reduced to nothing more than a rapist. He is a predator who took advantage of a young man’s naïve trust in a paternal figure. Like the antagonist from *Cruising*, François visits a gay nightclub in search of his prey. He lures Christian to an isolated location and brutalises the unsuspecting victim. He is a stereotypical Queer Villain, the wolf in sheep’s clothing, the monster in a cautionary tale meant to teach young men not to trust their gay uncle lest he rapes them. François’ character villainises SGD men in Afrikaner communities. In addition to destroying François’ character arc and betraying the viewer’s sympathy toward François, the rape scene is shot in a way that is severely traumatising to see and makes viewing the film a psychologically harmful act. The issue with *Skoonheid* is not the inclusion of the rape scene; it is the nature of the scene.

Botha criticises the film and states that it is “ultimately about villains and victims.”<sup>376</sup> I agree. The rape scene reduces François from a complicated character to a Queer Predator, and Christian’s

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<sup>375</sup> The term is used recurringly as an insult throughout the film. *Skoonheid*, 2011.

<sup>376</sup> Botha, “The Representation of Gays,” 8.

prior ambitions disappear to the viewer as he is reduced to a mere victim. Botha reads the rape as an illogical progression in François' arc, stating that "[t]here is not much psychological motivation for François's violent behaviour and the act appears as a rather clumsy narrative device."<sup>377</sup> I disagree and argue that François is a controlling and domineering character, who places his needs above others. Botha sees Christian's character as underdeveloped and illogical. I argue that Christian is deliberately underexplored as the viewer is meant to experience Christian as François does: a perfect object of beauty. Ultimately, François does not know Christian any better than the viewer does.

As opposed to Botha, both Sonnekus and Grant Andrews<sup>378</sup> see the rape as a justified progression in François' violent outbursts.<sup>379</sup> François has only ever known intimacy with a man as a sexual encounter that he controls. By rejecting François, Christian essentially disempowers him. This infuriates François and causes him to explode into a violent attack upon Christian wherein he denies Christian the power of consent.

*Skoonheid* is unique in its subversion of conservative assumptions and representation of a traditionally Afrikaans, masculine, queer man. It is an essential film, as people like François – closeted Afrikaner men who oppress their sexualities to conform to a toxic Afrikaner masculine ideal – do exist. The greatest issue with *Skoonheid* is the overall lack of LGBTQ+ representation in the South African film industry. *Skoonheid* is one of the only Afrikaans films with a queer protagonist, but the film does more damage to queer representation in South Africa because the protagonist is a rapist. If *Skoonheid* existed among many other films with more positive queer representations, my only critique of the film would have been the explicit violence of the rape scene. *Skoonheid* is about an SGD man who rejects his sexuality due to misconceptions of what it means to be an SGD man. Simultaneously the film offers a negative image of what an Afrikaans SGD man looks like, meaning that the film becomes a part of the culture it tries to criticise.

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<sup>377</sup> Botha, "The Representation of Gays," 8.

<sup>378</sup> Research Fellow at Stellenbosch University.

<sup>379</sup> Theo Sonnekus, "We're not Faggots!': Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Representation of Afrikaner Men Who have Sex with Men in the Film *Skoonheid* and Online," *South African Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2013): 22-39. Andrews, "The Boundaries of Desire and Intimacy."

## 4.4 Pity Your Gays Tropes

Hollywood's Pity Your Gays (PYG) trope refers to the assumption that LGBTQ+ couples will not end up together and that LGBTQ+ characters will have miserable lives or become victims of violence. I named these forms of the PYG trope as No-Happy-Endings, Misery, and Victimhood. South African films feature many LGBTQ+ side characters that remain single throughout the film. In the cases of SGD couples, these couples are more likely to stay together than their Hollywood counterparts. South African films do not employ the No-Happy-Endings trope as frequently as Hollywood. Similarly, LGBTQ+ side-characters are less likely to be miserable or become victims than Hollywood's. However, these tropes are relatively common in LGBTQ+ protagonists and central characters' stories. This section first explores how the different variations of the PYG trope are employed in South African films. Thereafter, the main discussion focuses on this section's primary film, *Moffie*, which employs all three applications of the PYG trope.

### 4.4.1 South Africa's Applications of No-Happy Endings, Misery, and Victimhood Tropes.

The No-Happy-Endings PYG trope mainly occurs in the form of single SGD men who end up alone. Mainstream Afrikaans comedies like *Pretville*, *Liefeling* and *Jimmy in Pienk* feature a single SDG man who does not find a romantic partner. In *Pretville* and *Liefeling*, these characters are depicted as indifferent to romance, and they do not seem interested in having a partner. Bunny in *Jimmy in Pienk*, however, is unhappy about his loneliness. Bunny is a stereotypical Queen whose life revolves around the protagonist's goals. Yet, he has moments wherein he seems sad and in search of a romantic partner. Similarly, François in *Skoonheid* longs for a romantic SGD relationship. *Skoonheid's* ending focuses on François, who sits in a Spur with an envelope full of money and watches an MDM couple. This scene reveals how badly François wants an intimate relationship with another man. François ends up alone and unhappy.

The Misery application of the PYG trope is less common in South African films. As South African films tend to limit queer characters to comic reliefs, not many films feature LGBTQ+ characters

that are complex enough to be miserable. François in *Skoonheid* is clearly unhappy, and his misery stems from his sexuality. Similarly, Johan in *Kanarie* is deeply unhappy and faces intense internal turmoil while coming to terms with his sexuality. His mental state declines until he spirals into a frenzied dissociative state, wherein he injures himself.

The Victimhood application of the trope is easily recognisable. In *Rafiki*, after Kena and Ziki make love for the first time, they are found together and assaulted by their community. Considering South Africa's and other African countries' high rates of "corrective" rape,<sup>380</sup> the first viewing of the film was a terrifying experience because the viewer anticipates that the two women might become victims of "corrective rape." Thankfully, Ziki and Kena are not raped. However, the assault scene still conveys the cruelty and threats that SGD women in African countries face. Despite how prevalent and well known the hate crime is in South Africa, I have not yet found a film exploring or addressing this crime that targets black lesbians.

*Kanarie* also depicts a scene that conforms to the Victimhood trope. A senior military official sexually assaults Johan. Before the assault, Johan tries to come out to his sister. Her panicked rejection of his identity forces him back into the symbolic closet. Unable to bear being around her anymore, Johan leaves her house and hitches a ride back to camp. The military official who gives him a lift pulls over and sexually assaults Johan. This scene mirrors the accounts of SGD men in the SADF during Apartheid. In the South African documentary, *Property of the State*,<sup>381</sup> the survivors recount that SGD men were the targets of sexual assault by their heterosexual peers and superiors. This assault is the catalyst for Johan's mental breakdown. Similar to *Kanarie*, this section's primary film, *Moffie*, also explores the experiences of SGD men in Apartheid South Africa's military.

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<sup>380</sup> Corrective rape refers to a hate crime that targets SGD women. The perpetrators target SGD women, and rape them, "in order to 'cure' them of their lesbianism." Andrew Martin, et al., "Hate Crimes: The Rise of 'Corrective' Rape in South Africa," *Action AID* (2009), 3, <https://shukumisa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/hate-crimes-the-rise-of-corrective-rape-report.pdf>.

<sup>381</sup> *Property of the State: Gay Men in the Apartheid Military*, directed by Gerald Kraak (SA: National Film and Video Foundation) 2004.



#### 4.4.2 *Moffie*'s Stereotypes and Tropes

*Moffie* was released in 2020 in South Africa and has faced distribution difficulties after the film's theatrical release was disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, the film was finally made available for streaming in South Africa. The title "*Moffie*" is derived from an Afrikaans homophobic slur best translated as "faggot." Similar to *Kanarie*, *Moffie* explores life in the SADF for young white South African men.<sup>382</sup> *Moffie*'s focus is broader than that of *Kanarie*. Where *Kanarie* offers an in-depth character study of a specific SGD man in the SADF, *Moffie* explores what the SADF was like in general. The film's protagonist, Nick, is an SGD man, but he is not the film's primary focus. Whereas Johan is *Kanarie*'s focus, Nick is the vessel through which *Moffie* examines life in the military during Apartheid.

*Moffie* tells the story of how SGD men were treated in the SADF. The film explores the threats that these men faced, like being sent to Ward-22,<sup>383</sup> and how the military discriminated against English men. The protagonist, Nick, falls in love with another recruit, Stassen. Both men are English, and Stassen, an English man with an earring, is the target of their superior officer's abuse. The threat of being exposed is a constant theme throughout the film. The two other SGD men in the film are Hilton and Baxter, who are also English. They are caught together in a toilet stall, violently assaulted, exhibited and berated in front of the troops, and repetitively labelled as "*moffies!*"<sup>384</sup>

*Moffie* conforms to the three variants of the PYG trope. Nick and Stassen are the central romantic couple, and their love story follows the No-Happy Endings trope. Their relationship develops slowly and organically. Like Ziki in *Rafiki*, Stassen is sent away to keep Stassen and Nick apart. Unlike Ziki, however, Stassen is placed in a psychiatric institution where he is exposed to torturous conversion therapy.<sup>385</sup> After completing his time in the military, Nick

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<sup>382</sup> The film is based on André Carl van der Merwe's 2006 novel of the same title.

<sup>383</sup> *Property of the State*, 2004.

<sup>384</sup> The troops repeatedly scream "*Moffies!*" "Faggots!" Every time they are asked what Hilton and Baxter are. *Moffie*, 2019.

<sup>385</sup> In the *Property of the State* documentary, Mike Smith, a Ward-22 survivor explains the shock therapy that he underwent for 45 – 60 minutes daily. The "patient" is shown pictures of men and made to discuss the pictures until he becomes aroused at which point, he is electrocuted. *Property of the State*, 2004.



returns home and sets out to find Stassen. Stassen is a broken man and, at the end of the film, he leaves Nick. The central couple does not end up together due to the torture Stassen had to endure. Here, the film closely resembles the plot of *Spring Fire*. As discussed in Chapter 3, the lesbian pulp novel is the first PYG text. Like the SGD characters in *Spring Fire*, the one half of *Moffie*'s SGD couple becomes mentally unwell and breaks the other's heart.

The second SGD couple in the film, Hilton and Baxter, also conform to the No-Happy-Endings trope. When they are caught together, they are beaten with artillery-filled pillowcases, publicly shunned, and sent to Ward-22. After completing their "therapy," they return to the SADF as broken men. The two are kept apart and become social pariahs. In an unexpected scene, Baxter grabs a rifle, runs into the yard, and publicly shoots himself. In this No-Happy-Endings couple, one half dies, and Hilton ends up alone.

Stassen and Hilton conform to the Misery aspect of the PYG trope. Stassen is an SGD man tortured to the point where he loses his warm and charming personality. Stassen suffers throughout the film, and the psychological impact is visible in his broken state at the end. Similarly, Hilton endures torture and returns a broken man. Additionally, Hilton's lover, Baxter, commits suicide. Hilton becomes a frail, ostracised, and profoundly depressed man who cannot mourn his lover for fear of being assaulted. Hilton and Baxter conform to the Victimhood trope. They are two SGD men who become victims of extreme violence due to their sexualities. The three characters subjected to Ward-22 (Hilton, Baxter, and Stassen) conform to the Victimhood trope, as they become victims of cruel torture techniques due to their sexualities.

In addition to employing the three forms of the PYG trope, *Moffie* also depicts a Queer Villain and conforms to the Bury Your Gays Trope. In a flashback, young Nick is revealed to exhibit predatory behaviour when he stares at a boy taking a shower. Young Nick becomes aroused and is caught with an erection. This scene equates queerness with deviant behaviour and an inability to control oneself. Furthermore, Baxter's death is a BYG Suicide. His death serves to reveal the cruel homophobia of the film's setting.

*Moffie*'s final problematic elements are concerned with language, stereotypes, and Apartheid propaganda. There are four SGD characters in the film, and none of them is Afrikaans. Similar to

*Skoonheid, Moffie* conforms to the ideas that the film sets out to challenge. The film critiques that the military assumes that English men are MDM, yet the film's only SGD characters are English men. Furthermore, Hilton conforms to the Sissy stereotype. He is small, frail, skittish, and dominated by other men. Finally, none of the Ward-22 survivors engages in SGD behaviours after their release; Baxter kills himself, Hilton isolates himself, and Stassen leaves Nick. As Ward-22 aimed to "cure" men from their sexualities, the film seems to imply that the treatment in Ward-22 was "successful" as the three men are not seen engaging in SGD behaviours again. Ward-22 seemed to traumatise Baxter, Hilton, and Stassen into conforming to – or removing themselves from<sup>386</sup> – heteronormative society. Although the film likely aimed to portray the devastating effects of Ward-22, the film still implies that "conversion therapy" works by converting SGD men into broken men.

Despite the film's concerning aspects, *Moffie* is still an essential South African film. *Moffie* offers the most accurate film depiction of what life was like in the Apartheid government's SADF. The film's opposite, the SADF-funded Apartheid propaganda film, *Boetie, gaan Border Toe!* glamourises the aspects that *Moffie* bluntly addresses. Ward-22 is also a part of South Africa's history that mainstream films rarely depict. *Moffie* is an important Afrikaans film and contributes to South African cinema. However, as one of South Africa's only queer-films, *Moffie* is very problematic.

## 4.5 Bury Your Gays

The Bury Your Gays (BYG) trope refers to the assumption that LGBTQ+ characters are more likely to die in films than their heteronormative counterparts. The three most common applications of the BYG trope in Hollywood are: Suicide (the character's Internal World rejects their sexuality or gender identity), Purge (the character's Social World rejects them and murders or executes them to remove them from the society) and AIDS (it seems that the Natural World disapproves of the character which causes the character to contract and succumb to a "natural cause" – a virus). The first two applications are prevalent in South African films, but the AIDS

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<sup>386</sup> By means of suicide.

BYG application is unique to Hollywood. AIDS is seen as a gay-specific virus in the USA, as it first seemed only to affect gay men, whereas AIDS in South Africa is associated with poverty. The mentality around the virus also differs in the two countries. In South Africa, there is a stigma of shame and silence around AIDS. As a result, despite the high HIV and AIDS infection rate in South Africa,<sup>387</sup> the virus is hardly addressed in South African films. This section first explores how the BYG trope is employed in South African films. After that, the main discussion focuses on this section's primary film, *Inxeba*, which depicts one of the most damaging BYG examples in South African films.

#### 4.5.1 South Africa's Applications of the Suicide and Purge BYG Tropes

The depictions of death are not as common in South African films as in Hollywood films. Therefore, there are also far fewer examples of BYG trope employment. Suicide is a widely avoided on-screen topic in South Africa; however, *Moffie* depicts a BYG Suicide. Following Hollywood's tradition, a PYG character commits suicide to escape unbearable circumstances. Baxter, in *Moffie*, commits suicide around halfway through the film. His death comes as a shock and interrupts a more festive scene of camaraderie. While the other recruits play volleyball and discuss their holiday plans, an off-screen conflict unfolds. The viewer is left to guess what drives Baxter to steal a firearm and run outside. He is pursued by other soldiers who try to calm him down. Once Baxter is cornered, he turns the gun on himself. After a first viewing of the film, it is not entirely clear who the soldier was that killed himself. I knew his name was Baxter, and I suspected that he was one of the SGD men who were caught together in a stall. I had to watch the film a second time and pay close attention to the characters' names to confirm that Baxter was, indeed, an SGD man, making his death a BYG Suicide.

Similar to Hollywood's BYG deaths, Baxter's death is a world-exploration tool. His death represents the suicides that occurred in the SADF's training camps. The documentary *Property*

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<sup>387</sup> Avert editors. "HIV and AIDS in South Africa," Avert.org, updated April 15, 2020, <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/south-africa>.

*of the State* explores the high rate of suicides in the SADF. There was a 40% annual increase in self-inflicted deaths, the army had a 6% higher suicide rate than the rest of the country, and in some years more men died by suicide than during battle.<sup>388</sup> Given the abuse and torture suffered by SGD men, one can assume that SGD men made up a large part of those statistics. Baxter's death is not about Baxter. The viewer does not know him and never even hears him speak. He is a voiceless character who is victimised before killing himself publicly. His death is shocking and upsetting. The film focuses on how his death affects the surviving SGD characters but somehow ignores how his remaining lover, Hilton, feels about it.

The Purge application of the BYG trope has two forms: murder and execution. This section's primary film, *Inxeba*, depicts a BYG murder and is discussed in *Inxeba's* film analysis below. *Proteus*<sup>389</sup> is a relatively unknown South African queer film that depicts a Purge execution.<sup>390</sup> The film tells the true story of two Robin Island prisoners in the 1700s – during the colonial period in South Africa. The two men are a mixed-race SGD couple; Rijkhaart is a white Afrikaans man, and Claas is a black Khoi man. The men fall in love and have private meetings where they make love. Similar to Hilton and Baxter in *Moffie*, Rijkhaart and Claas are caught. The two men are taken to the mainland, where they stand trial and are found guilty of “sodomy”. The colonial government executes Rijkhaart and Claas; they are tied together and drowned at sea. This ending is the opposite of the No-Happy-Endings trope. The two lovers die together, in each other's arms. Poetically, they do end up together – forever.

#### 4.5.2 *Inxeba's* Stereotypes and Tropes

*Inxeba* explores *Ulwaluko*, the Xhosa initiation ritual wherein Xhosa boys are taken out of their home environments into a selected rural area where they are circumcised and placed in huts to heal with the assistance of caretakers.<sup>391</sup> The film's name “*Inxeba*” means “the wound” and refers to the physical wound from the circumcision that needs to heal during the remainder of the

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<sup>388</sup> *Property of the State*, 2004.

<sup>389</sup> *Proteus*, directed by John Greyson and Jack Lewis (SA: Standard Releasing) 2003.

<sup>390</sup> Greyson, the writer and director of *Proteus* also directed another significant LGBTQ+ film called *Lilies*. As a Canadian film which is relatively unknown in South Africa, *Lilies* is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>391</sup> Older Xhosa men who went through *Ulwaluko* themselves as young men.

ritual. The title can also refer to the symbolic wound that SGD men represent in traditional South African cultures. It can be argued that homophobic communities view SGD men as wounds in the symbolic societal body – wounds that need to be hidden, treated, sterilised, or even removed.

*Inxeba* simultaneously tells the stories of two African SGD protagonists: Xolani and Kwanda. Xolani is a closeted SGD Xhosa man who has a secret love affair with a married man – his childhood friend Vija. Kwanda is an SGD Xhosa boy, whose father forces him to attend *Ulwaluko* as a sort of gay-conversion camp because, as Kwanda's father states: "the boy's too soft."<sup>392</sup> By viewing the film through the scope of the two different protagonists, two distinct narratives are constructed: one of forbidden love and the struggle to accept oneself, and the other a coming-of-age tragedy of unrequited love. Despite, or more likely because *Inxeba* is one of the only isiXhosa LGBTQ+ movies, the film had become a topic of controversy when it was unjustly rated X18<sup>393</sup> by South Africa's Film and Publication Board. The ruling has since been overturned, but its spotlight on homophobia in traditional South African cultures has persisted.

*Inxeba* employs the BYG Purge trope. Like Jack in *Brokeback Mountain*, Kwanda is an SGD boy who refuses to conform to his homophobic society. Once Jack and Kwanda's convictions become clear, their deaths seem inevitable. Unlike Jack – who is murdered in a hate-motivated gang killing – Kwanda is murdered by the man he loves, Xolani, and his death serves to protect Vija's secret. Like Algie the miner, Kwanda is removed from the city because "something's not right with these rich boys from Joburg"<sup>394</sup> and sent to the countryside where he is expected to change into a more acceptable man. Unlike Algie, however, Kwanda refuses to change because he accepts himself. Kwanda cannot be allowed to leave the camp unchanged; therefore, he must die.

Kwanda's murder becomes a sort of honour-killing. When the other boys return to the village – signifying that they completed the initiation ritual – Kwanda's absence does not cause concern. Their lack of concern suggests that the community accepts his death as a necessary cleansing

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<sup>392</sup> *Inxeba*, 2017.

<sup>393</sup> X18 rating is reserved for hardcore pornography.

<sup>394</sup> *Inxeba*, 2017.

event. As a wound on the community, they view his murder as an honour-killing that purges the community of an unwanted member.

The film does not explore any consequences of Kwanda's death, which implies that there are no consequences to explore. Vija returns to his family, and Xolani returns to the city, alone and probably permanently. After sacrificing Kwanda to his community's virility, Xolani becomes the scapegoat and exiles himself to protect his lover and community. Kwanda's murder is a BYG Purge example because he is killed due to his Social World's rejection. His death is not investigated, and his murderer does not face the justice system, which implies that his community does not consider his murder a crime. Although Kwanda is murdered because of Vija's sexuality and not his own, his community commits a hate crime by being complicit in his murder due to his sexuality.

In addition to employing the BYG trope, *Inxeba* employs the No-Happy-Endings PYG trope. The central lovers, Xolani and Vija, do not end up together. The film's ending implies that they might never see each other again. Despite the controversy around the film, *Inxeba* is still a relatively conservative film. The film explores how homophobia in traditional South African cultures can cause deaths, but the film does not problematise homophobia as a mentality. Perhaps *Inxeba* only meant to explore *Ulwaluko* and the Xhosa community's treatment of SGD men, in which case the film succeeded.

## 4.6 Conclusion

The five types of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes that originated in Hollywood have been adopted into South African cinema. The Queen MDM stereotype is the most prevalent, while the more damaging tropes – like PYG and BYG – are relatively rare. Unfortunately, these tropes are rare because there are very few depictions of complex LGBTQ+ characters or SGD couples in South African cinema. Similarly, the lack of WDW stereotypes is credited to South Africa's overall lack of queer women depictions. Unlike Hollywood, South Africa does not employ queer-coding and, therefore, there are hardly any South African examples of Queer-Coded Villains.

The primary films *Kanarie* and *Rafiki* offer the fairest and least damaging representations of LGBTQ+ South Africans. Although *Kanarie* depicts MDM stereotypes, the film does not employ the more damaging LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. More significantly, it is one of the only South African films that depict an SGD love story with a happy ending. *Rafiki* subverts almost all LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes and offers positive and complex role models for girls and women.

*Moffie* and *Inxeba* are progressive films that, unfortunately, play into regressive LGBTQ+ myths and depict harmful LGBTQ+ tropes. In *Moffie*, the BYG Purge trope is justified because it depicts a hidden part of Afrikaner history. The film's employment of the No-Happy-Endings PYG trope, however, plays into apartheid myths and homophobic hopes. *Inxeba* is a relatively conservative film, despite the controversy around the film. The film *Proteus*, released over a decade before *Inxeba*, is more progressive and less stereotypical in its depiction of South African SGD men and intimacy.

*Skoonheid*, finally, is the most troubling of the five films. In an interview, Oliver Hermanus, the film's co-writer and director, explains that the film was inspired "by an advert [...] in a newspaper looking for white, married Afrikaner men to participate in a twice-weekly all-male orgy."<sup>395</sup> A film exploring a hidden part of Afrikaans culture – macho *boere* who participate in "all-male" orgies – is an original concept and something that Afrikaans cinema needs. However, a film that depicts a closeted SGD man as a predatory rapist closes the doors that the first topic might have opened to discussions surrounding sexuality in Afrikaner cultures.

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<sup>395</sup> Tymon Smith, "Directors Chat: Oliver Hermanus," *Times Live*, August 5, 2011, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2011-08-05-directors-chat-oliver-hermanus/>.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

So no more films about homosexuality. Instead, more films that explore people who happen to be [LGBTQ+] in America [and South Africa] and how their lives intersect with the dominant culture.<sup>396</sup>

While the film medium is presented as a mere means of entertainment, it is undoubtedly also a powerful tool of influence that shapes the ways people view themselves and others. Due to historical, conservative censorship and restrictions on Hollywood and South African filmmakers, LGBTQ+ characters and stories have a distinct history of being underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream films. It is easier to find films with stereotypical depictions of LGBTQ+ people and overused storylines that follow antiquated tropes than it is to find films with complex LGBTQ+ characters and compelling narratives.

Given that film studios are profit-driven businesses, filmmakers are limited in the stories they tell, as funding is allocated to endeavours with perceived high prospects of making money. This profitability perception calculation is based on two factors: the target audience and proven success. Firstly, with wealthy interest groups in the USA and SA being relatively conservative, films promoting conservative ideals – which often include homophobic myths – are more likely to be financed than films promoting progressive ideals. Secondly, past success is a good – albeit inaccurate – indicator of future success, and stories that worked in the past inform stories told in the present. This rigid filmmaking system is reluctant to change out of fear of failure. It perpetuates outdated – and harmful – narratives at the cost of more accurate and inclusive stories of marginalised groups, like the LGBTQ+ community.

The recent rise in the fame of alternative- and queer-films – as seen in the popularity of *Call me by your Name* and the high acclaim that *Moonlight* received – indicates that there is a lucrative target audience for films that tell LGBTQ+ stories. However, most of these films continue to

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<sup>396</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 326.



play into outdated LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes, remnants of the defunct Hollywood Production Code.

This chapter concludes the dissertation and summarises the key findings in line with the research aims and questions identified in Chapter 1. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the dissertation's contributions to the field of LGBTQ+ representations in Hollywood and South African films, specifically referencing the five primary South African queer-films. Lastly, this chapter reviews the limitations of the dissertation and proposes possible opportunities for further research.

## 5.1 Key findings – research aims and research questions

This study aimed to identify Hollywood's most prevalent LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes and examine how they are reproduced in South African films. As detailed in Chapter 3, the results indicate that most of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes originated during Code-Era Hollywood – as filmmakers sought to find new ways to depict queer characters without addressing their sexualities. These findings also indicate that the more damaging stereotypes and tropes originated during Post-Code Hollywood. Following the repeal of the Code and the relaxation of other restrictions, filmmakers were simultaneously allowed to portray LGBTQ+ characters, explicit sex, and violence onscreen and frequently opted to project all three (former) taboos onto single characters. Furthermore, these LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes evolved – for example, the Lesbian-chic evolved into an iconic Queer Killer (the Lethal Lesbian) – and these different versions existed simultaneously.<sup>397</sup> Further findings, in Chapter 4, show that South African films replicate most of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes (like the Men-desiring-men Queen stereotype and the Bury-Your-Gays Suicide trope) but not all of them (like the Queer-Coded Villains stereotype and the BYG AIDS trope).

The dissertation answers the four research questions which are concerned with: why the quality of LGBTQ+ representation in films matters, what LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes are the most

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<sup>397</sup> As seen in *Basic Instinct* and *Girl from Nowhere*.

prominent in Hollywood films, which of these are replicated in South African films, and whether South Africa's queer-films subvert or conform to these stereotypes and tropes.

Firstly, in Chapter 2, I posit that representation matters because mirror images from films impact the process of personal identity formation and influence the expectation that people have of one another. Furthermore, the film medium is a powerful propaganda tool that continues to perpetuate dominant ideologies. In short, onscreen depictions have real-world consequences.

Secondly, in Chapter 3, I examine the prominent LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in Hollywood, which addresses the second research question. This research identifies and categorises five types of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes: Men-Desiring Men Stereotypes, Women-Desiring Women Stereotypes, Queer Villains Stereotypes, Pity Your Gays Trope and Bury Your Gays Trope. These stereotypes and tropes reduce LGBTQ+ people to one-dimensional characters meant to be laughed at, pitied, or feared. Overall, these characters and their stories serve singular purposes in larger plots and are usually not depicted as people with whom viewers should identify.

Thirdly, in Chapter 4, I find that, although most of Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes are replicated in South African films, the South African film industry utilises some of these depictions significantly more than others. MDM stereotypes are the most common and were used during apartheid as they supported the government and SADF's homophobic rhetoric. Lastly, Chapter 4 concludes that Hollywood's influence seeps deeply into South Africa's queer-films as most of these films mimic Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

## 5.2 Contributions to the field of LGBTQ+ representations

This dissertation offers a comprehensive discussion on Hollywood's LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. Most academic works fail to define and adequately categorise these stereotypes and tropes to promote their use in other studies. This is detrimental to the endeavour of examining LGBTQ+ representation. Consistent terminologies and definitions help researchers distinguish between different stereotypes and tropes, facilitate discussions, and promote further scholarship into the field of representation. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to advance this field by better operationalising and defining key terminology and concepts. This dissertation's

methodology is also replicable as other studies can expand the list of categories and types of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

This dissertation contributes to the growing field of LGBTQ+ representation by setting out a list of five criteria (in Chapter 1) that, according to the best of my knowledge, constitute fair depictions of LGBTQ+ characters and stories. These criteria are that LGBTQ+ characters: (1) are explicitly queer, (2) do not conform to most stereotypes and tropes, (3) are complex and experience growth, (4) are not the token character, and (5) do not embody the Other.

These criteria help address my research problem concerning how to measure acceptable LGBTQ+ representation. By employing these criteria, I conclude that films like *Rafiki* constitute fair representation. *Rafiki*, first and foremost, does not play into any harmful myths about LGBTQ+ people. Furthermore, Kena and Ziki:

1. Are explicitly same-gender-desiring (SGD) women, and one cannot argue that either is heterosexual.
2. Do not conform to stereotypes and tropes. While Kena exhibits some aspects of the Tomboy stereotype, she subverts its more harmful aspects. Similarly, although the two girls are victims of violence, their victimhood does not define them as they overcome the assault and end up together.
3. Are both complex characters who grow and develop their own beliefs and ambitions throughout the film.
4. Are not token characters.
5. Do not embody the Other.

I acknowledge that some may disagree with my criteria and that not everyone agrees on what constitutes fair LGBTQ+ representation. Nevertheless, based on my thorough application and extensive findings, these criteria efficiently constitute my understanding of fair LGBTQ+ representation. It is worth noting that South African films have far more men protagonists than women protagonists. As a woman, a film like *Rafiki* is significant on an individual level as there are far less films depicting complex women protagonists than men protagonists in South Africa and Hollywood.

Lastly, this dissertation enhances current theories of representation. It highlights the vital link between outdated past narratives and recently released films and illustrates how South African filmmakers mimic Hollywood filmmakers. It emphasises that films affect people's perception about themselves and others and influence how filmmakers depict LGBTQ+ characters and stories.

### 5.3 Limitations of this study

This dissertation's most significant obstacle was the accessibility of films. USA and SA distribution companies do not prioritise queer-films, which makes the process of accessing these films time-consuming, challenging, and sometimes impossible. Stereotypical LGBTQ+ characters are commonly found in heteronormative films; however, these films' synopses and summaries fail to address the presence of these characters. Therefore, it is conceivable that there are LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in Hollywood films – which are also replicated in SA films – that I failed to identify.

Furthermore, despite the existence of numerous film databases, there is no comprehensive source that sufficiently identifies all LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes in films. Online databases, like *IMDB* and *Does the Dog Die*, are incomplete and often inaccurate. The most effective data collection method was obtaining and watching films I suspected contained LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. While this process was necessary, it was very time consuming, often fruitless, and – once again – severely limited by the problem of accessibility.

Russo's book includes a Necrology that identifies LGBTQ+ character deaths in films between 1919 and 1986. Unfortunately, this list fails to distinguish between deaths that can be classified as BYG deaths and those that cannot. Most of these films are inaccessible, and I relied heavily on online summaries, film reviews, and journal articles to discern the context of these deaths. This limitation invites the possibility of an unaddressed incarnation of the BYG trope that I could not identify.

Finally, there are no universally agreed-upon lists of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes – meanings that I had to name some of them. Although limited, the list presented throughout this

dissertation may serve as the possible foundation for and facilitate the development of a more comprehensive catalogue of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. In the meantime, this list contributes to the ongoing discussions surrounding the identification and analysis of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes.

## 5.4 Recommendations for possible future research

This dissertation overwhelmingly focuses on SGD representations and often neglects the depictions of the rest of the LGBTQ+ community. This disproportionate focus reflects Hollywood and SA's film industry. Both industries have a concerning lack of LGBTQ+ representations, and when their films depict LGBTQ+ characters or stories, these depictions are usually limited to SGD characters.

Films like *Boys Don't Cry* and *Bohemian Rhapsody*<sup>398</sup> feature BTQ+<sup>399</sup> identities, but in problematic ways. In any film that depicts a transgender person, I would argue that the character should be portrayed by a transgender actor who shares the character's gender identity, or, at least, by a cisgender actor who shares the character's gender identity. In films like *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Danish Girl*,<sup>400</sup> and *Dallas Buyers Club*, transgender characters are portrayed by actors of the opposite gender. These depictions create the impression that these filmmakers do not see the transgender characters as "real" men or women. Trans-men are men, and trans-women are women; visually representing them as anything else implies that the films support transphobic ideologies.

Similarly, bisexual and pansexual characters cannot be depicted as gay characters that are not ready to come *all the way* out of the symbolic closet, as seen in *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Alex Strangelove*.<sup>401</sup> Additionally, these characters cannot be depicted as straight people who had "just a phase"<sup>402</sup> or experimented before committing to be part of a "normal couple,"<sup>403</sup> as seen in

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<sup>398</sup> *Bohemian Rhapsody*, directed by Bryan Singer and Dexter Fletcher (USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) 2018.

<sup>399</sup> LGBTQ+ without the L (lesbians) and G (gays), therefore, the rest of the queer identities.

<sup>400</sup> *The Danish Girl*, directed by Tom Hooper (USA: Universal Pictures) 2015.

<sup>401</sup> *Alex Strangelove*, directed by Craig Johnson (USA: Netflix) 2018.

<sup>402</sup> *Scott Pilgrim Versus the World*, directed by Edgar Wright (USA: Universal Pictures) 2010.

<sup>403</sup> *Chasing Amy*, directed by Kevin Smith (USA: Miramax Films) 1997.

*Scott Pilgrim Versus the World* and *Chasing Amy*. There is a distinct need for more research into the portrayal of BTQ+ characters in films and their specific stereotypes and tropes. While analyses on blogs, websites and vlogs acknowledge these limitations, academia has hardly started exploring and addressing BTQ+ representations.

This dissertation also raised new questions about how many stereotypes or tropes films may include before becoming problematic. A quantitative study comparing the number of stereotypes and tropes in a film to the viewers' perceptions of the film – based on fair representation criteria – could yield exciting results and benefit the field of LGBTQ+ representation.

Furthermore, an event or timeline-specific study could help determine when South Africa started replicating the specified Hollywood LGBTQ+ stereotypes and tropes. Additionally, this research might help reveal why and how these stereotypes and tropes were adopted and how far back Hollywood's influence over the South African film industry stretches.

As a qualitative semiotic study, this dissertation focussed on the quality and meanings of films' contents. A quantitative study of South Africa's films – that determines what percentage of films depict LGBTQ+ characters, stereotypes and tropes – could significantly contribute to the study of the country's LGBTQ+ film depictions.

Lastly, while this dissertation examined *how* South African films copy Hollywood, it did not investigate *why*. Although I address some reasons – both industries have a similar history of censorship driven by conservative ideals – an investigation into the relationship between South African and Hollywood films might reveal more illuminating reasons.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Chapter 5 serves as a summary of the dissertation. Here, I explore how the dissertation fulfilled the research aims and answered the research questions set out in Chapter 1. Furthermore, I identify specific gaps in the literature and discuss how this dissertation bridges them and contributes to the field of LGBTQ+ representation. Finally, I acknowledge the crucial limitations of this research and explore several potential research avenues.

In the afterword of his book, Russo states that mainstream films that treat LGBTQ+ identities and experiences as “allegedly controversial issue[s] ... may be necessary evils but they’re not for [him].”<sup>404</sup> Russo’s statement houses a feeling of exhaustion over being insulted by mainstream films while maintaining hope that meaningful representations are a near reality. The South African film industry is stuck in the celluloid closet, still lacking films depicting South Africans who just happen to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. The five South African queer-films released in the last decade – *Kanarie*,<sup>405</sup> *Rafiki*,<sup>406</sup> *Skoonheid*,<sup>407</sup> *Moffie*,<sup>408</sup> and *Inxeba*<sup>409</sup> – received high praise and international acclaim. They will, hopefully, encourage the production and distribution of films that subvert Hollywood’s harmful stereotypes and tropes and, instead, explore the complex realities of the countless real LGBTQ+ South Africans.

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<sup>404</sup> Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 325.

<sup>405</sup> *Kanarie (Canary)*, directed by Christiaan Olwagen (SA: Marche Media) 2018.

<sup>406</sup> *Rafiki (Friend)*, directed by Wanuri Kahiu (Kenya: Big World Cinema) 2018.

<sup>407</sup> *Skoonheid (Beauty)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus (SA: Swift Productions) 2011.

<sup>408</sup> *Moffie (Faggot)*, directed by Oliver Hermanus (SA: Portobello Productions) 2019.

<sup>409</sup> *Inxeba (The Wound)*, directed by John Trengove (SA: NFVF) 2017.

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# Filmography

## Hollywood

*A Single Man*. Directed by Tom Ford. Distributed by The Weinstein Company, USA. 2009.

*Alex Strangelove*. Directed by Craig Johnson. Distributed by Netflix, USA. 2018.

*Algie, the Miner*. Directed by Harry Schenk and Edward Warren. Distributed by Solax Pictures, USA. 1912.

*American Gigolo*. Directed by Paul Shrader. Distributed by Paramount Pictures, USA. 1980.

*And Justice for All*. Directed by Norman Jewison. Distributed by Columbia Pictures, USA. 1979.

*Anger Management*. Directed by Peter Segal. Produced by Happy Madison, USA. 2003.

*Basic Instincts*. Directed by Paul Verhoeven. Distributed by TriStar Pictures, USA. 1992.

*Bohemian Rhapsody*. Directed by Bryan Singer and Dexter Fletcher. Distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, USA. 2018.

*Boy Erased*. Directed by Joel Edgerton. Distributed by Focus Feature, USA. 2018.

*Boys Don't Cry*. Directed by Kimberley Pierce. Distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. 1999.

*Bride of Frankenstein*. Directed by James Whale. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 1935.

*Brokeback Mountain*. Directed by Ang Lee. Distributed by Focus Feature, USA. 2005.

*Caged*. Directed by John Cromwell. Distributed by Warner Bros., USA. 1950.

*Calamity Jane*. Directed by David Butler. Distributed by Warner Bros., USA. 1954.

*Call Me by Your Name*. Directed by Luca Guadagnino. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, USA. 2017.

- Can you ever Forgive Me?* Directed by Marielle Heller. Distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. 2018.
- Carol*, directed by Todd Haynes. Distributed by The Weinstein Company, USA. 2015.
- Casablanca*. Directed by Michael Curtiz. Distributed by Warner Bros., USA. 1942.
- Chasing Amy*. Directed by Kevin Smith. Distributed by Miramax Films, USA. 1997.
- Cloud Atlas*. Directed by Lana Wachowski, Tom Tykwer, and Lilly Wachowski. Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, USA. 2012.
- Cruising*. Directed by William Friedkin. Distributed by United Artists, USA. 1980.
- Dallas Buyers Club*. Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée. Distributed by Focus Features, USA. 2013.
- DEBS*. Directed by Angela Robinson. Distributed by Samuel Goldwyn Films, USA. 2004.
- Disobedience*. Directed by Sebastian Lelio. Distributed by Bleecker Street. 2017.
- Dressed to Kill*. Directed by Brian de Palma. Distributed by Filmways Pictures, USA. 1980.
- Duck Butter*. Directed by Miguel Arteta. Distributed by The Orchard, USA. 2018.
- Frankenstein*. Directed by James Whale. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 1931.
- Glengarry Glen Ross*. Directed by James Foley. Distributed by New Line Cinema, USA. 1992.
- Greenbook*. Directed by Peter Farrelly. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 2018.
- Hercules*. Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Distributed by Walt Disney Pictures, USA. 1997.
- I Love You Philip Morris*. Directed by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra. Distributed by LD Entertainment, USA. 2009.
- I was a Male War Bride*. Directed by Howard Hawks. Distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. 1949.
- It Chapter Two*. Directed by Andy Muschietti. Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, USA. 2019.

- Little Miss Sunshine*. Directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris. Distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. 2006.
- Lover Come Back*. Directed by Delbert Mann. Distributed by Universal Pictures: USA. 1961.
- Mean Girls*. Directed by Mark Waters. Distributed by Paramount Pictures, USA. 2004.
- Milk*. Directed by Gus Van Sant. Distributed by Focus Feature, USA. 2008.
- Monster*. Directed by Patty Jenkins. Distributed by Newmarket Films, USA: 2003.
- Moonlight*. Directed by Barry Jenkins. Distributed by A24, USA. 2016.
- My Days of Mercy*. Directed by Tali Shalom Ezer. Distributed by Lionsgate, USA. 2017.
- Philadelphia*. Directed by Jonathan Demme. Distributed by TriStar Pictures, USA. 1993.
- Pillow Talk*. Directed by Michael Gordon. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 1959.
- Psycho*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Distributed by Paramount Pictures, USA. 1960.
- Rent*. Directed by Chris Columbus. Distributed by Sony Pictures Releasing, USA. 2005.
- Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*. Directed by Edgar Wright. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 2010
- Suddenly, Last Summer*. Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Distributed by Columbia Pictures, USA. 1959.
- Tea and Sympathy*. Directed by Vincente Minnelli. Distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. 1956.
- Teen Wolf*. Directed by Rod Daniel. Distributed by Atlantic Releasing Corporation, USA. 1985.
- The Boondock Saints*. Directed by Troy Duffy. Distributed by Franchise Pictures, USA. 1999.
- The Boys in the Band*. Directed by William Friedkin. Distributed by National General Pictures, USA. 1970.
- The Broadway Melody*. Directed by Roy Del Ruth. Distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA. 1929.

*The Celluloid Closet*. Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, USA. 1995.

*The Danish Girl*. Directed by Tom Hooper. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 2015.

*The Devil Wears Prada*. Directed by David Frankel. Distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, USA. 2006.

*The Gay Divorcee*. Directed by Mark Sandrich. Distributed by RKO Radio Pictures, USA. 1934.

*The Normal Heart*. Directed by Ryan Murphy. Distributed by HBO, USA. 2014.

*The Princess and the Frog*. Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Distributed by Walt Disney Pictures, USA. 2009.

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Directed by Jim Sharman. Distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, USA. 1975.

*The Shawshank Redemption*. Directed by Frank Darabont. Distributed by Columbia Pictures, USA. 1994.

*The Sign of the Cross*. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Distributed by Paramount Pictures, USA. 1932.

*The Silence of the Lambs*. Directed by Jonathan Demme. Distributed by Orion Pictures, USA. 1991.

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Directed by Tobe Hooper. Distributed by Bryanston Distributing Company, USA. 1974.

*The Ultimate Gift*. Directed by Michael O. Saibel. Distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, USA. 2007.

*Titanic*. Directed by James Cameron. Distributed by Paramount Pictures, USA. 1997.

*To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*. Directed by Beeban Kidron. Distributed by Universal Pictures, USA. 1995.

*V for Vendetta*. Directed by James McTeigue. Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, USA. 2005.

*Wreck-It Ralph*. Directed by Rich Moore. Distributed by Walt Disney Pictures, USA. 2012.

## South Africa

*Bakgat! (Great!)*. Directed by Henk Pretorius. Distributed by Ster-Kinekor Pictures, SA. 2008.

*Bakgat! Tot die mag 3 (Great! Cubed)*. Directed by Stefan Nieuwoudt. Produced by Dark Matter Studios. 2013.

*Die Ontwaking (The Awakening)*. Directed by Johnny Breedt. Produced by Enigma Pictures, SA. 2015.

*Faith like Potatoes*. Directed by Reghardt van den Bergh. Distributed by Affirm Films, SA. 2006.

*Girl from Nowhere*. Directed by Mark Jackson. Produced by Jacsonfilm, SA. 2017.

*Hoofmeisie (Head Girl)*. Directed by Morné du Toit. Produced by The Film Factory, SA. 2011

*Inxeba (The Wound)*. Directed by John Trengove. Funded by the National Film and Video Foundation, SA. 2017.

*Jimmy in Pienk (Jimmy in Pink)*. Directed by Hanneke Schutte. Produced by Light and Dark Films, SA. 2013.

*Kanarie (Canary)*. Directed by Christiaan Olwagen. Produced by Marche Media, SA. 2018.

*Liefeling (Beloved) (die Movie)*. Directed by Brian Webber. Distributed by Indigenous Film Distribution, SA. 2010.

*Lipstiek Dipstiek (Lipstick Dipstick)*. Directed by Wilie Esterhuizen. Produced by Westel Produksies, SA. 1994.

*Moffie (Faggot)*. Directed by Oliver Hermanus. Produced by Portobello Productions, SA. 2019.

*Mr. Bones*. Directed by Gray Hofmeyr. Distributed by Videovision Entertainment, SA. 2011.

*Mrs Right Guy*. Directed by Adze Ujah. Distributed by Netflix, SA. 2016.

*Out in Africa*. Directed by Catherine Stewart. Produced by Out in Africa, SA. 2015.

*Pad na jou Hart (Road to you Heart)*. Directed by Jaco Smit. Distributed by The Film Factory, SA. 2014.

*Platteland (Countryside)*. Directed by Sean Else. Produced by Philio Films Ltd., SA. 2011.

*Pretville*. Directed by Linda Korsten. Produced by Hartiwood Films, SA. 2012.

*Property of the State: Gay Men in the Apartheid Military*. Directed by Gerald Kraak. Funded by the National Film and Video Foundation. 2004.

*Proteus*. Directed by John Greyson and Jack Lewis. Distributed by Strand Releasing, SA. 2003.

*Quest for Love*. Directed by Helena Nogueira. Produced by Distant Horizon, SA. 1988.

*Semi-Soet (Semi-Sweet)*. Directed by Joshoua Rous. Distributed by Nu Metro, SA. 2012.

*Skoonheid (Beauty)*. Directed by Oliver Hermanus. Produced by Swift Productions, SA. 2011.

*Susters (Sisters)*. Directed by Corne van Rooyen. Produced by Inhoud Huis Media, SA. 2018.

*The World Unseen*. Directed by Shamim Sarif. Distributed by Enlightenment Productions, SA. 2007.

*Thys en Trix (Thys and Trix)*. Directed by Quentin Krog. Produced by The Film Factory, SA.

## Other

*Anders als die Andern (Different from the Others)*. Directed by Richard Oswald. Distributed by Richard Oswald-Film Berlin, Weimar Republic. 1919.

*Below her Mouth*. Directed by April Mullen. Distributed by Gunpowder and Sky, Canada. 2016.

*Kinky Boots*. Directed by Julian Jarrold. Produced by BBC Films, UK. 2005.

*La Vie d'Adèle (Blue is the Warmest Colour)*. Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche. Distributed by Wild Bunch, France. 2013.

*Pride*. Directed by Matthew Warchus. Distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, UK. 2014.



*Rafiki (Friend)*. Directed by Wanuri Kahiu. Produced by Big World Cinema, Kenya. 2018.

*Romeo and Juliet*. Playwright by William Shakespeare. 1597.

*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Directed by Stephan Elliot. Distributed by Roadshow Entertainment, Australia. 1994.