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## **Be Gay, Do Crime!**

Queer People's Perception of the Representation of Queerness and  
Criminality in Entertainment Media

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## Abstract

The main goal of this study is to provide insights and knowledge into the matters of queer representation in entertainment media, with a particular focus on the depiction of queerness in association with crime on-screen, from the perspective of the LGBTQIA+ community itself. More specifically, the investigation is grounded on four main theories relating to queer studies, intersectionality, social identity theory and queer criminology.

Therefore, guided by standpoint theory, as a way to center the voices of the minority being studied, this investigation was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews with a sample of 10 different queer individuals, from different backgrounds and identity labels, being that most of them came from a European background. Through the use of thematic text analysis of the interview transcripts, data and codes were obtained, which served to investigate and assess participants' opinions and outlook in regard to the questions of media representation of queer identities, and the intersection of LGBTQIA+ people and crime, particularly in a media context.

The findings suggest that queer people feel, most of the time disconnected from the media images of queerness portrayed on-screen. Either due to their lack of diversity that fails to acknowledge the community's heterogeneity, the using of stereotypes, the sensationalization of queer suffering, or the lack of the queer perspective within the narratives. In turn, they crave a quiet type of representation, which allows them to just be normal people. Finally, the findings also show apprehension in regard to the portrayal of queer people as criminals in media, as a recognition of its importance was paired with a fear of being stereotyped as criminals.

It is then possible to assert that, this thesis contributes to complement studies regarding queer representation in media by positioning itself on the side of the community being portrayed and their experience. At the same time, it presents a new, under researched type of representation relating to crime vs. queerness, its relation with the community and implications.

**Key Words:** Queer; LGBTQIA+; community; criminality; representation; intersectionality; heteronormativity; power; identity; marginalization; visibility.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Research Questions and Approach .....	7
<b>Guide to Core Concepts</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Constructing Identities .....	10
Social Identity Theory .....	11
Recognizing Diversity.....	13
Intersectionality .....	14
Queer of Color Critique.....	16
Queer Representation on Screen .....	18
The History of Queerness On-Screen: Celluloid Closet .....	18
The Repercussions of Representation .....	20
Overview on Queer Criminology .....	22
LGBTQIA+ vs. The Law .....	22
Criminology and Queerness .....	23
<b>Methods and Methodology</b> .....	<b>27</b>
Theoretical Framework - Standpoint Theory .....	27
Qualitative Interviews .....	28
Sampling.....	29
Coding.....	31
Ethical Concerns .....	32
<b>Analysis</b> .....	<b>34</b>
Projected Identity.....	34
The Screen as a Mirror.....	34
Alienating Representation .....	38
One Size Fits All? – The Intersections of Queerness On-Screen .....	38
“Bad Publicity is Still Publicity !” .....	42
Stereotyping and Recycling .....	44
Tired Tropes .....	48

Normal Heart – The Yearning for Quiet Queerness .....	51
Queering Crime .....	54
Born Criminal.....	54
The Necessity of Gay Crime .....	57
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Reference List.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>76</b>

# Introduction

The slogan “Be Gay. Do Crime!” was born on a graffiti mural in Marseille in 2016, being quickly embraced by the online queer community. The slogan is in many ways an anti-capitalistic and anti-authoritarian statement which, according to a Reddit user, implies that given the historic criminalization of homosexuality around the world, as well as the Stonewall riots uprising, crime and incivility can be seen as necessary means to earn equal rights<sup>1</sup>.

But why is this a thing, and why has the queer community adopted and embraced this, at first glance, unflattering slogan and association? Is there, in fact, some deeper truth and relation to be found in the connection between the LGBTQIA+ community and crime? And what role does media play in fostering or perpetrating this notion?

In a time where positive queer representation in media is gaining more attention, and becoming more prevalent, with shows like *Heartstopper* (2022) or movies like *Love, Simon* (2018) reaching mainstream success, I wish to look at the representation, not of the wholesome, coming of age LGBTQIA+ story, but of the “bad queer”. I wish to look at the stories featuring gay men being involved in organized crime, like in the Thai series, *KinnPorsche* (2022), or transgender women committing credit fraud, such as in *Orange is the New Black* (2013 – 2019).

Notably, extensive research has been done on queer representation and its effects, as well as on the exploration of different tropes and stereotypes, that are often associated with queer people in media (particularly, the queer-coding of villains). However, there are not many, if any, available academic works done on the representation of queerness intersecting with criminality in media. This research gap is, in my opinion, particularly glaring when considering the history of the queer community, and its relationship with the criminal justice systems.

When looking at the LGBTQIA+ history, the connection with crime through identity becomes a rather obvious one. Not only was queerness, and the engagement with non-heteronormative and gender binary standards considered a crime, punishable by law for several years, but also, a lot of the civil rights movements which shaped the community

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<sup>1</sup> Comment reference: [deleted account] (7 October 2021) Why is "be gay, do crime" a thing? (Reddit Comment), r/lgbt, accessed 17 November 2023 ;[https://www.reddit.com/r/lgbt/comments/q3h0mf/why\\_is\\_be\\_gay\\_do\\_crime\\_a\\_thing/](https://www.reddit.com/r/lgbt/comments/q3h0mf/why_is_be_gay_do_crime_a_thing/)

and granted them rights, such as the previously mentioned Stonewall Riots, went against law and police establishments. Likewise, through the history of LGBTQIA+ representation on screen, it is also possible to verify this phenomenon. Namely, with factors like the Hays Code - which will be explored later in the literature review -, pushing for this narrative of “queer as criminal” on-screen.

Evidently, these on-screen representations have a very real and palpable effect on the individuals and communities it portrays, as well as in the shaping of general audience’s perspective of these individuals and groups. According to Guthrie, Kunkel and Hladky (2013), representations of especially minority groups, convey strong messages in regard to what can be considered right or wrong, and natural or unnatural, which can consequently affect said minority groups self-esteem and sense of group strength in extreme negative ways (p.21). Not only that but, the authors also point out how several studies have confirmed how positive or negative portrayals of a group in media, can either respectively decrease or increase prejudice against members of said group.

As a result, I decided to focus my research on the perspectives and effects of queer on-screen media representation, specifically from the standpoint of individuals from the community. I wish to better understand both, what their viewpoint on the effects of media portrayals is, and what type of representation is favored by them. Also, I aim to assess what is their outlook and opinion on the specific case of “queer as criminal” portrayals in film and TV. Finally, I am looking to understand how the members of the LGBTQIA+ community perceive the queer content that has been produced, if it is an accurate representation of the queer experience, and if it matches the ways in which they wish to be portrayed.

By centering queer voices in this research, I wish to on the one hand, get more nuanced and personal perspectives on minority group media portrayals and experiences, and the ways in which they affect said group, as the experiences of an oppressed group such as this, is able to provide an important source of critical insight (Harding, 2004, p. 7). On the other hand, I wish to use this essay as a platform to enhance the voices of this marginalized group, to grant them the space and attention they are so often deprived of. Furthermore, I believe it to be my responsibility as a researcher, whose work focuses on a marginalized minority community, to respect and highlight said community, and to in a conscious and considerate way, center the investigation around them.

## **Research Questions and Approach**

While taking all this into account, I established three research questions that will guide this project, and which I will attempt to answer by the end of this essay, namely:

- Do queer people living in Europe identify with the characters and stories portrayed in entertainment media and if so, how?
  
- What type of queer representation is favored within the LGBTQIA+ community?
  
- How do queer people living in Europe perceive the association of queerness and criminality often portrayed in entertainment media?

Finally, in order to answer these questions, I will be conducting a series of interviews with individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community, which will inform my results and conclusion. Moreover, I will be exploring and analyzing some important and crucial literature and theories in the literature review, that will not only guide and inform the direction of the research, but also ground it in established academic concepts and ideas. More specifically, I will be focusing on research in the areas of identity, diversity, media representation of queer groups, and queer criminology.

## **Guide to Core Concepts**

Meanwhile, to better understand the type of research that is being conducted in this essay, it is important to clarify some of the key complex concepts, that stand at its very core, prior to entering any academic discussion. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the broadness and shifting nature of the concepts and terms queer and LGBTQIA+, make it particularly difficult to pin down.



According to McCann and Monaghan (2020), both the acronym LGBTQIA+, and the word queer, are used as umbrella terms to describe a group of sexually and gender diverse minority individuals, outside of the heterosexual, gender binary standard (p.10). These can range from gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transexual, pansexual, intersex, asexual, queer, non-binary, two-spirit, and a variety of different sexual and gender minority identity markers, or a combination of multiple. However, it is important to recognize the limitations, and problematic homogenization that come with using umbrella terms such as these, to categorize and describe such diverse communities. Even though in certain circumstances, an umbrella term such as queer can be used as a way to unify and solidify a community's ranks in the face of "outsiders", its use can also be perceived as a false unifier. The term as a unifier, which homogenizes and erases the differences within the group, by shoving all the races, ethnicities and classes under the same "queer" umbrella (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 164).

Furthermore, the matter of conflating biological and cultural understandings of gender and sexuality, ignores their complex nuances and differences, while at the same time, twisting the varied ways in which these are perceived and viewed in several non-western societies (Altman, 2018, p. 1252). Despite its limitations, and the ways in which it lacks in capturing the intricate nuances present within this group, the terms queer and LGBTQIA+, are still the best and most fitting ones for the purposes of this research project. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the issues that come with its use, and at the same time exploring, and taking them into account throughout the research process, I will be using them interchangeably, to refer to the subjects of this study.

Secondly, since I am exploring the relationship between queerness and criminality on-screen, and the different ways in which the idea is understood within different contexts and settings, I ought to establish what the understanding of crime used in this investigation is. It is important to, once again, recognize the complexity of this concept, and the multiple different approaches and standpoints that can be taken when defining it.

For instance, criminal law is described by White, Haines and Asquith (2012) as being:

“a collection of state-enforced prohibitions and procedures that are informed and shaped by politically and socially constructed ideas of right and wrong that are concerned with human behaviour.” (p. 6)

However, when approaching the concept of crime, its pinning down is much more complex. While it is possible to take a strictly legal perspective, assuming that a crime is simply a legal wrongdoing, which can be followed by criminal procedures and eventually, punishment (Williams, 1983, p. 27), the approach that crime can also be interpreted as an act or conduct, that causes harm to the community, person or property is also pointed out as a possibility (White, Haines and Asquith, 2012). On the other hand, Rob White, Fiona Haines and Nicole Asquith (2012, cited in White, Haines and Asquith, 2012), take the violation of human rights as the standard for defining what consists crime, although this approach does not reflect the current reality of the criminal law system.

Due to this broad, and diversified range of approaches to the subject of crime, and the complex scope of society forces that influence the labelling of specific conducts as crime, I decided to take the criminal law study approach for this research project. More specifically, whenever I mention crime within the essay presented here, I am referring to the White, Haines and Asquith (2012) conception that an act “*is not a crime in any formal legal sense unless the relevant authorities of the state have made it one.*” (p. 9). By using an understanding, and in a way simplified definition of this concept, it becomes easier to understand the arguments being made in this research.

Finally, due to the fact that, this is a relatively small research project, and also that media is such a wide and distinctly diverse concept, in this research project, I will be focusing solely on fictional entertainment media, more specifically, audiovisual fictional entertainment media. By narrowing down the investigation mediums, I am able to present more comprehensive and focused results and conclusions.

On the one hand, by picking a medium such as audiovisual media, more specifically film and TV series, which are more accessible to mainstream audiences, and that have higher rates of consumption and engagement (Guttmann, 2024), it is possible to narrow down the scope of the research, whilst assuring its relevance to the study subjects. On the other hand, the choice to focus on fictional pieces of media, removing content such as true crime, documentaries, adaptations of real-life stories, or any content based or rooted in real-life events, I am able to focus mostly on the representation of queerness on screen. Not only that but, for the most part, it enables me to avoid having to go into more complex, and controversial conversations regarding the glorification and idolization of actual criminals (Lara, 2023).

# Literature Review

## Constructing Identities

Some of the most important aspects of the human experience are directly related to the construction of identity, and community. People's inherent need for self-assertion through identity construction, and the search for community are inescapable conceptions, especially in a study concerning minority groups such as the one presented here. When talking about the construction of identification, Hall (1996) found that it was achieved through "*a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.*" (Hall, 1996, p.2). Moreover, this process is recognized by Hall as being in constant development, never completed, always evolving and changing, akin to the construction of one's own personal identity.

Particularly, when talking about the concept and idea of identity, it is important to recognize its malleability, how its construction is a constant and ever-changing process. Identity is not a stagnant thing, individual's personal experiences, environment and development, are able to shape and mold a person's perspective, and sense of being and self, at any given point. Although we can recognize that, there is a stable core that defines one's personhood in a more visceral manner, a core that informs the ways one might respond to external stimulus, events and environment, it is not possible to remove these external factors from the conversation regarding identity construction.

In his work *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall (1996) talks about how identities, especially in a contemporary context, are heavily fragmented, and constructed across a wide variety of intersecting, and at times opposing standpoints, discourses and practices, always subject and victim to a constant process of transformation (Hall, 1996, p.4). Even though that stable core, present within all people, remains unchangeable, the "outer layers" are subject to constant reshaping, through of process of "becoming".

"actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been

represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.” (Hall, 1996, p.4)

### ***Social Identity Theory***

In the same line, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) defends that, the construction of one’s individual identity is partially built, through the identification with specific groups, being that such identifications serve to both protect, and strengthen an individual’s own identity (Islam, 2014, p.1781). This process is done through, not only the categorization of an individual’s “*in-group*”, but also, through counterposing it against an “*out-group*”, resulting in the identification with a collective, group-based identity (Islam, 2014). As such, Tajfel and Turner (1979) defend that, these groups give individuals a framework through which they can begin to understand themselves, based on shared characteristics, values or objectives, being that an emotional bond is established through this identification.

Although this type of identity construction model can be found in the most diverse range of groups and communities, from nationality to age, or religion, it is important to note that different social or group identities, take shape in different ways. Notably, Islam (2014) refers how, “*when groups pose a threat to one another, the effects of identification increase*” (Islam, 2014, p.1782). This happens due to the innate need for individuals within different groups, which might be perceived as competition, to establish comparisons (Treppe, 2006, p. 258). Furthermore, the stronger the rivalry, and the stronger the perception of the “*out-group*” as a threat to an individual’s community, the stronger the “*in-group*” members sense of belonging and identification with said group will be (Islam, 2014, p.1781).

As such, it is easier to understand how, a marginalized group such as the LGBTQIA+, which faces constant threats from heteronormative, cisgender society and groups, and often is perceived as a threat by them, would stand more firmly in their sense of identity as a part of the queer community. In fact, according to Lee (2003, cited in Hudson, 2015, p.29), this sense of community belonging, present within marginalized groups can serve as a buffer, protecting these groups from the effects of discrimination. Not only that, but several studies have proven how, a sense of belonging can also serve as an important

factor in protecting queer individuals, or people of color, from negative health and mental health problems, such as depression, suicidal ideation and low self-esteem (McCallum & McLaren, 2011, cited in Hudson, 2015, p.29).

As revealed by Trepte (2006), people seek positive representations of their “*in-group*” as a means to enhance their self-esteem and develop a positive social identity (p.255), while also attempting to achieve self-knowledge and actualization (Hogg & Abrams, 1990, cited in Trepte, 2006, p.260). As such, the author focuses on the ways in which “*social identity determines media selection and media preferences [and] how the media affect social identity*” (Trepte, 2006, p.260).

The idea that media audiences select the content they prefer to consume and engage with, based on their specific group memberships, began to be explored during the late 90’s (Trepte, 2006, p. 260). From, gender to ethnicity, sexuality or class, each identity category can serve as an element of connection and identification, between an audience member and a piece of media. By seeking favorable depictions in media of the “*in-group*” they belong to, audience members are able to, on the one hand, strengthen their social identity through positive identification, and on the other, as stated before, develop their self- knowledge and actualization. (Trepte, 2006, p.264).

Nevertheless, Trepte (2006) believes that the choice to engage with media that both matches their own identity, as well as it delivers positive, gratifying portrayals of it, is not the only reason why individuals search for media featuring “themselves”. Through it, they are also able to access information on their groups and their status (Trepte, 2006, p.265). Consequently, we can analyze how “*Minority media may encourage social mobility. Similarly, mainstream entertainment is able to influence the belief structures of social mobility and social change.*” (Trepte, 2006, p.265), both within the represented “*in-groups*”, as well as amongst the “*out-groups*”.

However, it is important to recognize that there is still variation within groups - especially if they are as diverse as the LGBTQIA+ -, and individuals from the same identity community might have different perspectives and approaches on the subject of identity and media. In particular, Morton and Duck (2000, cited in Trepte, 2006, p.266) looked into the specific case of gay media usage, and how it affected - depending on the identification level -, members of the gay community. They found that, only the members that strongly identified with the gay community and label, were truly influenced and

impacted by the messages transmitted through these media channels. This in turn, opens the door for the exploration of the difference in perspectives, as well as in relational and identification ties, present within a non-monolithic LGBTQIA+ community and queer individuals.

## **Recognizing Diversity**

When talking about a group as big and diverse as the LGBTQIA+ community, it is essential to recognize the diversity of experiences present within it. While exploring and researching anything related to queer individuals, particularly relating to their representation and association with alternative, and in many ways underground, lifestyles and experiences, it was of the utmost importance to mention and take into account the multiple intersectional identities present within this group. This is because, these identities shape each queer individual's personal and unique experience, affecting the way they understand the world, their privileges (or lack thereof), outlook, and relations, both within, and outside the community.

Indeed, when talking about identity construction, there are a series of factors that shape and define one's personhood, experience, and privileges. From race to gender identity, but also sexuality, class, religion, or cultural background. Within each and every one of these, it is possible to identify the marginalized minorities who are deprived of opportunities, whose voices are consistently disregarded and quieted, and who suffer the most discrimination.

From a more Western context, these minorities are made up of those who do not fit the white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class standard. This makes it so, despite both identifying as queer, the experience of a black lower-class transgender woman, and that of a white middle class gay man, cannot be truly compared since, in reality, they do not have access to the same playing field. Therefore, their experiences and struggles are not the same.

## *Intersectionality*

In this way, the concept of intersectionality which, although has its origins in feminist studies, being coined by Kimberley Crenshaw's work on *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, has since been coopted by gender studies and the queer community. In it, Crenshaw describes the concept of intersectionality stating,

“Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

In the same manner, queer individuals with multiple marginalized minority identities, are at a higher risk of being victimized, being barred access to spaces and privileges, and not being granted platforms in which to tell their stories. This is reflected in, “*the ways in which varying relations of power exist not only among heterosexuals, but also among those who label themselves queer.*” (Cohen, 1997, p. 449). As revealed by, not only the presence, or absence of, for instance people of color, in media channels, but also in their lack of access to positions of power.

Indeed, the focus on LGBTQIA+ issues and activism as a single-issue framework, focusing solely on the discrimination targeting the queer label, marginalizes, for example, individuals of color from the movements that claim them as a part of their constituency (Crenshaw, 1989). The author further claims that, this approach hinders the bigger goal of ending both racism, and the patriarchy. Being that, both these concepts affect the queer rights movements in many of the same ways it does the feminist ones.

Additionally, by ignoring the complex nature of the intersectional identities within groups, we're ignoring the ways in which current political structures shape discrimination as singular issues. Meaning, they affect the way we think about the issue of discrimination of intersecting identities, by isolating each identity's struggles as detached from the others. This structure, according to Kimberley Crenshaw, “*imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo.*” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167)

Consequently, by isolating these struggles, division is created within communities, such as the LGBTQIA+, making it so the voices of the most privileged members from these groups take precedence over those of the multiply burdened ones, resulting in discrimination from within. Not only that, but this singular focus on a specific, privileged faction of a group, results in biased notions and ideas of said group, its struggles, wants, and needs, grounded solely on the perspectives of a small percentage of the community.

In turn, this narrow focus, that marginalizes the voices of the multiply disadvantaged members of the community, goes against efforts to restructure the access to opportunities, as well as it creates constraints in the rethinking and adjustment of established hierarchical structures (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 145).

In her essay, *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?*, Cohen (1997) talks about the strategies constructed and established, with the supposed intention of assimilation of peripheral individuals. More specifically, how most times, they are exposed as a means to grant access to the *status quo*, solely to the most privileged members of these outsider communities. While these members continue to benefit, and gain access to spaces and privileges, “*the most vulnerable in our communities continue to be stigmatized and oppressed.*” (Cohen, 1997, p. 443).

Indeed, Cohen (1997) goes on to mention how, by reimagining and restructuring the politics of marginalized groups, it is possible to both emphasize and highlight the perspectives and lives of different communities, particularly within the LGBTQIA+ sphere. At the same time, it makes it possible to identify those intersectional aspects of resistance, which signify and indicate wider and interconnected political struggles which affect several groups. Besides,

“For many of us, the label “queer” symbolizes an acknowledgement that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility.” (Cohen, 1997, p. 440)



## *Queer of Colour Critique*

In many of the same ways that Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory accounts for the "monocausal protocols [which] are established through the reproduction of normative accounts of woman that always imply a white feminist subject and equally normativizing accounts of blackness that assume maleness." (Muñoz, J. E., 1999, p.8), queer studies also focus heavily on the perspective of white queer individuals. According to Muñoz (1999), the idea of queerness as being a "white thing" is reinforced, in an odd manner, by the dominance of the white standpoint in mainstream Western gay culture.

In his work *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz reflects on how, most of the canonized works and theories from queer studies, which are taught in academic spaces, and serve as the knowledge pillars of the subject, are in fact, focused specifically on the analysis of white lesbians and gays. Nevertheless, the author also recognizes that, the lack of inclusion through a "soft multicultural inclusion of race and ethnicity does not, on its own, lead to a progressive identity discourse" (Muñoz, J. E., 1999, p.10). Despite this, Muñoz goes on to mention how, by ignoring the aspect of race in queer studies, and approaching race, gender and sexuality as separate, independent identity markers, the idea that it is possible to have discussions on queerness whilst ignoring the race aspect, gets fostered and becomes the norm.

However, it is not possible to separate, approach and analyze an individual's identities independently from one another, since they all work in tandem to inform and shape one's life and experience. As previously showcased by Crenshaw, for individuals with multiple minority identities, discrimination can take a number of different forms, and affect an individual in a number of different ways, depending on which intersectional identity road it's coming from.

Consequently, Muñoz (1999) suggests that disidentification was adopted as a way to combat the highly segregated manner in which race, class, gender and sexuality studies are conducted. In his work, he describes it as,

"Disidentification is meant to offer a lens to elucidate minoritarian politics that is not monocausal or monothematic, one that is calibrated to discern a multiplicity of interlocking identity components and ways in which they affect the social" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 8)

Furthermore, the concept of disidentification has been adopted by queers of color as a way of dealing with dominant ideology, more specifically, ideologies which assume whiteness, heteronormativity and gender binary, as the norm and standard. By neither assimilating, nor opposing the dominant ideology, queer people of color can, through disidentification maintain a safe balance between being a participant in normative society, whilst still resisting it.

The main goal of this approach is to “*transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance.*” (Muñoz, 1999, pp.11-12), in a sort of “quietly defiant” way. By not caving in to the pressures of assimilating to the dominant, normative ideology and society, while at the same time not trying to completely break ties, and oppose it, through disidentification these groups are able to bring change from within.

Whilst appearing apolitical on the surface, Disidentification uses Foucault’s theory on the polyvalence of discourse, which recognizes

*“the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy”* (Foucault, 1978, p.101)

This perspective can work both work in favor of the group’s political goals of liberation, and also shift of the normative ideologies. By adapting to the discourses and fluxes of power, and being flexible in its approach, this ideology is able to grant these marginalized queers of color groups, an entry point for conducting change, and inserting themselves seamlessly into discourses and spaces.

## Queer Representation on Screen

### *The History of Queerness On-Screen: Celluloid Closet*

The presence of queer or, more often, queer coded characters and images on-screen, specifically cinema and tv, can be traced to the very beginning of the Hollywood era. In *The Celluloid Closet*, Russo (1981) mentions how, queerness has been an integral part of film's history from the start, with several movies featuring queer-coded characters and plot lines. For example, the first erotic kiss between two characters of the same gender dates back to 1922, in Cecil B. DeMille's *Manslaughter*. At the same time, film, and later television, have also helped to shape the community and its expression within American culture.

Firstly, homosexuality was presented in disguise, by giving characters traits which the audience could implicitly decode as being stereotypically connected to homosexuality, in a phenomenon also known as the “celluloid closet” (Kim, 2017, p. 157). In fact, “*Gay visibility has never really been an issue in the movies. Gays have always been visible. It's how they have been visible that has remained offensive for almost a century*” (Russo, 1981, as cited in Campbell and Carilli, 2013, p. 44). In fact, Campbell and Carilli (2013) talk about how, more frequently than not, Hollywood representations of homosexual characters resorted to portraying caricatured depictions of gay characters, which play into a sort of innate fear, present within straight audiences in regard to gay individuals (p. 42).

Significantly, when approaching the theme of queer representation on screen, how it shaped the queer community and experience, as well as, the ways in which it affected how the community is viewed and treated by society at large, it is impossible not to mention The Motion Picture Production Code<sup>2</sup> (1930). Also known as The Hays Code, this was a self-imposed set of rules and guidelines, that determined what could be showcased on-screen between 1934 and 1968, by Hollywood itself. This document was constructed as a means to preserve, and nurture “high moral standards” within, not just a decadent Hollywood, but mostly amongst audiences and the public. This was done

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<sup>2</sup> Named after the president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) William H Hays, “The code prohibited profanity, suggestive nudity, graphic or realistic violence, sexual persuasions and rape. It had rules around the use of crime, costume, dance, religion, national sentiment and morality. And according to the code – even within the limits of pure love or realistic love – certain facts have been regarded as outside the limits of safe presentation.” (O'Brien, cited in Lewis, 2021).

through prohibiting, or tightly defining how certain subjects were portrayed, or not. In fact, the failure to comply to these guidelines, could result in the boycotting of a film.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that, at the time of the writing of this code, homosexuality was categorized as, not only an act of sexual perversion (Talmey, 1933), but also an act of sodomy, punishable by law (Weinmeyer, 2010). By instating that “*SEX PERVERSION or any inference to it is forbidden.*” (Doherty, 1999, Appendix 2, p. 363), the code doomed any semblance of positive, or even explicit queer representation on-screen for more than 30 years. In addition, the code demands that no positive, or sympathetic representations of homosexuality, or queerness can be presented in movies, by explicitly stating that,

“The presentation of crimes against the law, human or divine, is often necessary for the carrying out of the plot. But the presentation must not throw sympathy with the criminal as against the law, nor with the crime as against those who must punish it” (Doherty, 1999, Appendix 1, p.351)

With the lifting of the Hays Code in 1968, productions no longer had to limit themselves to connotative depictions of queerness, using iconography, subtext and character typing, in order to have queer visibility (Kohen, 2016, p.45). After this, denotative, open, and explicit portrayal of LGBT characters and stories started to become a more common occurrence (Kohen, 2016, p.45). Likewise, Kohen (2016) defends that, alongside the Stonewall Riots of 1969 (which were a series of spontaneous violent demonstrations against the police, conducted by LGBTQIA+ people in New York), the abolishing of the code played a key role in highlighting the importance, and power of granting visibility to minority groups. This newfound visibility, would then play an important part in movements for LGBTQIA+ rights.

In turn, this shift allowed the focus to shift from the need for outright representation, towards the quality and scope of the content being presented. Thus, Kohen (2016) presents the idea of the “closet-as-screen”, which recognizes how limited and filtered queer visibility in media is. Instead of just focusing on whether LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities are being portrayed on screen, whether they are visible or invisible, we ought to question how they are being represented and most importantly, who is being

represented. As such, the author appeals for a deeper look into “*which forms of queer representation have existed where, when, and for whom.*” (Kohen, 2016, p.3)

### ***The Repercussions of Representation***

Representation is not an innocent act, the ways in which producers and creatives choose to present specific characters, identities and archetypes has, in fact, consequences in society, and in the experience of the individuals who look and identify with the said characters. The ways in which groups and individuals are portrayed has repercussions, either intentional or unintentional, positive or negative. Therefore, looking at the ways in which media chose, and chooses, to portray certain identities can help to better understand society’s attitudes towards them.

In particular, through the negative portrayal of coded homosexual characters as perverse, villainous, and having their stories end with punishment (Kim, 2017), Hollywood shaped the way straight audiences and society perceived gay people, and also how gay people themselves perceived their own identities (Russo, 1981). According to Campbell and Carilli (2013), the stereotyping and mistreatment of minority groups within media, teaches viewers to, not only associate specific negative stereotypes with said groups, but also, does not encourage the audience to empathize with, or understand, in this specific case, queer people’s experiences in a heterosexist world (p.43).

This is rather important point to take into account, especially due to the fact that, several studies have showcased how being introduced and exposed to positive representations of different groups within media, helps combat prejudiced views towards said groups (Guthrie, et al., 2013, p.27). As such, the main question regarding representation in a contemporary context focuses, not so much on the quantity, but most importantly on the quality of the content being produced and released, and the ways in which images of these groups are perpetuated through it.

Indeed, minority groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, do not get to see their own experiences and identity frequently, or accurately represented in media. Consequently, the effect of seeing oneself portrayed and represented is described by Warn (2006, cited in Guthrie, et al., 2013) as a disproportionate flush and trill of emotions

(p.21). The author also refers how this might not be fully understood by those who are either straight or white, and are used to seeing themselves, their stories and experiences frequently portrayed in media (p.21).

Consequently, Kohen (2016) pushes for the recognition that, equating queer visibility with the portrayal of white gay and lesbian characters and experiences, erases the broad and diverse spectrum that is present within the LGBTQIA+ community. Through this erasure, the wide range of people, cultures, gender and sexual identities, experiences, and manners of life that shape the queer community, are made invisible (p.3). Moreover, by failing to acknowledge the ways in which “*the blank screen that makes queer visibility possible is fundamentally tied to discourses of whiteness [...] a history of willful forgetfulness [is perpetuated].*” (Kohen, 2016, p.20). A history which characterizes and defines the white body and identity as the standard, normative model.

In other words, it becomes impossible to detach the subjects of race, sexuality and gender, as they shape and affect intersectional identities, experiences and representation. Through the assumption of whiteness as the standard model of representation, one that requires no explanation or fleshing-out, academia, entertainment, and visual media will continue to perpetuate the incorrect notion that race, gender and sexuality constitute unrelated social formations. (Kohen, 2016, p.25).

The reasons for this erasure of diversity can be attributed to a plethora of different excuses, from profitability concerns, to power structures who define what material gets produced, and about who. Furthermore, from the point of view of Western heteronormative society, there is only one specific racial profile, class hierarchy, and family model that can be recognized, accepted, and profitable. (Kohen, 2016). A model which is intimately tied with whiteness, middle to upper-class standards, and traditional Christian family models and values.

Questions of gender identity and expression, or diverse spectrums of sexuality are, alongside race and class, subjects that rarely get explored within media, specifically relating to queer characters. In their 2023 Studio Responsibility Index, GLADD (2023) found that, from the 100 queer inclusive films released in 2022: 55% featured gay men; 45% lesbians; 21% bisexual+ characters; only 12% included transgender characters, and 17% queer characters. Furthermore, the same study revealed that, whilst nearly 50% of

the media featuring queerness released in 2022, featured male LGBTQIA+ characters, only 3% included non-binary representation. As for the race of the queer characters portrayed on screen, the numbers are equally as unbalanced, with 59.7% of characters being white, and the remaining 40% being divided between black, latinx, API multiracial, MENA and indigenous representation (GLAAD, 2023).

As we can see, this constrictive model inherently excludes the majority of the LGBTQIA+ members, making them invisible, due to their non-conformity to these ideals and standards. This results in a rather narrow, standardized and repetitive portrayal of queerness on-screen, one that aims to remain appealing to white, non-queer audiences. Although this pattern has slowly began to shift, with more shows and movies starring and featuring a more diverse range of identities, experiences and ways of life within the queer spectrum being released, there is still a long way to go. With the popularity and success of shows like *Pose* (2018) or *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009), or the awarding of movies such as *Moonlight* (2016) it is possible to hope that a more inclusive era of queer media is beginning to take place.

## **Overview on Queer Criminology**

### ***LGBTQIA+ vs. The Law***

As with any other group, it is possible to find patterns in the LGBTQIA+ community in relation to their involvement with crime. However, this group has a particularly unique relation with crime due to the fact that, their queer identity and being was, and still is in over 68 countries, considered a criminal act by law. According to Statista's data, of the 68 countries where private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity is jurisdictionally criminalized, 11 of them impose - or have it as a possibility -, the death penalty for such acts (Varrella, 2021). This means that LGBTQ+ people's very being, is still to this day, inherently connected to crime and transgression.

As seen before, for many years, being anything other than heterosexual and cisgender was considered a criminal offence punishable by law. The Hays Code's ban on any portrayal of queerness or "sexual deviation", trapped and stereotyped the community as

being dangerous villains, morally corrupt individuals, and outsiders who regularly engaged in a life of crime and transgression in media. Furthermore, whilst developing his subcultural theory, one of the three main social structure theories that identify key determinants of involvement with crime, Cohen (1966, cited in Woods, 2014) claims that homosexuals are a group of sexually immoral deviants, who had “*in common a propensity to some activity that is stigmatized and penalized by larger society*” (p. 26). But what is in fact, the reality of the LGBTQIA+ community and their relationship with the criminal system?

For this, we have to look into queer criminology research, as a way to better understand, not only if this connection is justified, but also, how and why it is shaped, as well as what and whose purpose it serves within the established power structures. This is a branch of criminology still in its infancy, which focuses on matters relating to sexual and gender minorities, more specifically LGBTQIA+ groups. By looking into real life expressions of the phenomenon of “gay crime”, we are able to better analyze the media that chooses to represent it. Also, the motivations and factors that may, or may not, lead this community’s members to engage in this type of unlawful behavior.

However, it is important to note that, the field of queer criminology is a relatively new, and under researched one. According to Peterson and Panfil (2014), the criminological and criminal justice research has been centered around heteronormative ideals and roles, which assume traditional sex-based gender roles (p.6). In fact, the under research, and lack of recognition of non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality, narrowed down the perspectives of the field. At the same time, it also failed to understand and respond to the particular, and specific problems and challenges that affect LGBTQIA+ groups (Peterson and Panfil, 2014, p.6). This in turn, affects the ways in which criminal justice systems deal with, handle, and view queer individuals and their involvement with crime as both victims and offenders.

### ***Criminology and Queerness***

In their research on *The LGBT Offender*, Dennis (2014) looks at the history of queerness in society, particularly in relation to the interpretation of it by the law. By looking at the character arc experienced by the community: starting out as a harmless deviant type; then



quickly shifting into an inherently malevolent, dangerous figure; only to be transformed into a weak victim around the mid-90's, it is possible to realize how LGBT individuals have been placed for so long, into constrictive, stereotyped boxes. Consequently, Dennis (2014) intends to highlight not the queer criminal or the queer victim, but something in between, the possibility of LGBT people being potential citizens or offenders (p. 87). The author defends that:

“Though it is nicer to be assumed a victim than a criminal, discourses of gay victims eliminates their agency and separates them from the normal, “everyday” world where crime is rare, an unwelcome intrusion from outside.” (Dennis, 2014, p. 94)

As such, for this research, I will only be focusing on the role and patterns of LGBTQIA+ individuals as perpetrators, and not victims. Although extensive research has been conducted on the matters of queer discrimination, hate crimes, and other instances of queer victimization - research that I believe to be very important in raising awareness and combating these serious issues -, my focus lies on the role of queer individuals as agents of crime and not victims of it. By looking at the ways in which they engage with crime, with which type of crime, and why, we are able to get a deeper look into the community itself, and perhaps, the voices within it that often don't get to be heard.

Moreover, it is important to recognize the ways in which an open discussion, and exploration of LGBTQIA+ people as criminals, might affect society's perception of the community. Firstly, it is important to recognize that, this discussion must be done with careful attention to nuance and tone, as to prevent further stigmatization of LGBTQIA+ people, based on gender identity or sexuality, and avoid undoing all the progress that has been achieved in the past decades (Woods, 2014, p.32). Secondly, regarding the question of, if it is better to leave this relation “unsaid”, if it would be more beneficial to a community who is only now beginning to get accepted by society, to not talk about their possible relationship with crime, Panfill (2013) states a vehement “no”.

The author believes that, to ignore LGBTQIA+ people's engagement with unlawful behavior, would be to further erase and ignore their lived experiences, as well as assuming a lack of agency on their part (Panfil, 2013, p.107). In their research, Panfil (2013) was

able to assess that crime is often adopted by queer individuals (in this particular case, gay men), as a means of discriminatory and exclusionary resistance, and a refusal to be passive victims of circumstances (p.107). Not only that, but leaving this connection unexplored, can ignore the ways in which it often works in favor of the queer liberation movement. How often, going against an unjust and discriminatory system is the only way to make yourself heard and your rights respected.

As a matter of fact, the subject of agency in relation to LGBTQIA+ and crime, is one of the main arguments in several queer criminology studies (Peterson and Panfil, 2014; Woods, 2014; Dennis, 2014; Frederick, 2014; Ball, 2012; Panfil, 2013). Whilst they recognize how discrimination, and marginalization of queer people often results in them being pushed into becoming involved with crime (crime by necessity), there is also a recognition of the ways in which crime can serve “*to acquire benefits such as social status, agency, autonomy, and self-esteem—resources that are often in short supply at society’s economic and social margins.*” (Frederick, 2014, p. 480).

This last phenomenon is pointed out by Frederick (2014), in their study on homelessness and sex work amongst young queer groups; by Panfil (2013), when researching gay men’s involvement with violent gang crime; also by Nadal (2014), in regard to transgender women in the sex work industry; and Dennis (2014), whilst discussing LGBTQIA+ people internalizing and acting on stereotypes. Another common point between all of these studies is - apart from the recognition of the hegemonic structures who place queer individuals and communities in the margins, barring access to privileges and opportunities -, the recognition of the complex diversity present within the LGBTQIA+ community.

In this way, it is also important to recognize, once again, how intersectionality plays a big role in defining and shaping queer experiences, particularly in relation to crime. As stated by Peterson and Panfil (2014) “*structural factors in the lives of queer people such as race, socioeconomic status, and region may themselves complicate hegemonic notions of sexual and gender identity.*” (p.4), as well as the ways in which they relate to societal structures and norms. Consequently, it is important to look into the multiplicity of circumstances in which different LGBTQIA+ individuals experience and commit crimes (Woods, 2014, p.16).

By recognizing how the community is not a monolith, and how different individuals, with different identity markers, whether that be race, gender identity, sexuality, class, or able-bodiedness, will have different experiences and perspectives, we are able to construct a more encompassing picture of it. Despite the fact that, an all-encompassing and perfectly well-rounded research, of the full spectrum of queer experiences is a near impossible feat to accomplish, by acknowledging it, and including different voices into this research, I am looking to possibly help introduce different perspectives into the academic sphere.

# Methods and Methodology

## Theoretical Framework - Standpoint Theory

When conducting a research project such as this one, which focuses on the representation of marginalized minorities in media, it is essential to have the voices of said minorities not only be featured, but more importantly, have them guide and shape the research and findings. By centering the investigation on the LGBTQAI+ community, on their views, experiences, and opinions we're able to ground the research on the epistemic privilege of queer individuals, which helps validate the findings. But also, it allows us to highlight the voices of individuals, and groups who are often relegated to the outskirts of society.

Furthermore, it becomes possible, through the research, to produce and highlight knowledge that positively services and supports the marginalized communities being studied. This is particularly important given that, researchers must take into account ethical matters, especially when investigating minority groups, in order to avoid exploiting said group. In turn, the best way to accomplish this is by constructing and developing the research around the group and maintaining their best interest in mind.

For this effect, I chose to base my methodological approach on Sandra Harding's standpoint theory, which advocates for the recognition of marginalized perspectives in the production of knowledge. The author describes it as a knowledge production model which focuses on maximizing objectivity of research results, by using a bottom-up perspective, and consequently producing knowledge "*for marginalized people (...) rather than for the use only of dominant groups in their projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized people*" (Harding, 1992, pp. 444-445).

Moreover, by taking in different perspectives, from a diverse range of ethnic, cultural, or class backgrounds, challenging institutionalized homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality, or racist and classist perspectives (Harding, 1992), researchers "*can generate less partial and distorted accounts of nature and social life.*" (Harding, 1992, p. 454).

Although Harding's theory focuses mostly on feminist perspectives, its inherent intersectional nature, which brings up issues related to race, class, and gender, allow it to be adopted and applied to contexts relating to sexuality and gender identity as well. This intersectionality is, as previously explored, an essential facet and component of the representation of queerness in media, particularly when in relation to crime.

Firstly, we ought to recognize how LGBTQAI+ individuals unique lived experiences are able to provide more nuanced and unique perspectives and ideas, which most likely differ from those outside of the community. By recognizing this epistemic privilege as a marginalized minority, and supporting the analysis on precisely this community's standpoint, we are able to, as previously mentioned, challenge dominant heteronormative and cis-normative narratives relating to media representation, at the same time that we give their voices a platform. According to Harding:

“In societies where scientific rationality and objectivity are claimed to be highly valued by dominant groups, marginalized peoples and those who listen attentively to them will point out that from the perspective of marginal lives, the dominant accounts are less than maximally objective. Knowledge claims are always socially situated, and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the effect of such advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically disadvantaged one for generating knowledge.” (Harding, 1992, p. 442)

## **Qualitative Interviews**

With this in mind, I chose to use semi-structured qualitative interviews as my single research method. By conducting qualitative interviews, I was looking to have a more community, and subject centric investigation, which would be more useful in regard to answering this project's research questions. This is also because, unlike other, more content analysis focused methods, interviews allow the audience, and in this case, media subjects, to guide the research and provide the findings. Its structure and nature are conducive to a more open “*hearing (of) respondents' views 'in their own words', which allows for a more complex analysis.*” (Byrne, 2012, p.467).

Additionally, the choice to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews in favor of other more structured interview or survey methods, came about due to their flexibility and way in which it “*allows interviewees to speak in their own voices and with their own language*” (Byrne, 2012, p.469). Byrne states that, qualitative interviewing can also be a particularly useful method when it comes to accessing individuals’ attitudes and values, which according to them, are matters that cannot be as easily evaluated and approached when using something like a formal questionnaire (Byrne, 2012, p.469).

By taking a more qualitative approach, using open-ended questions which allow for a more pondered and reflexive response on the interviewees side, it becomes easier to gauge and understand their views, opinions, experiences and interpretations. This openness towards the respondents’ personal views in turn, allows for a more complex analysis according to Byrne (2012, p. 469)

With this in mind, I constructed a provisional interview guide with twenty-five questions, which followed the main themes explored in the literature review, and which focused on answering – in a more layered and complex manner – this project’s research questions. The questions were constructed in a more direct, open-ended, “non-directive” manner, and focused on exploring the respondents’ personal views and perspectives, incentivizing them to expand and explore themes and ideas, as well as bring their own personal perspectives, experiences, and references. When given the space to rant, or talk about themselves and their communities, new themes would be able to emerge from the interviews.

Moreover, it is important to note that, semi-structured qualitative interviews allow “*for flexibility: the researcher can adapt in response to the reactions and responses of the interviewee.*” (Byrne, 2012, p.474). This means that, although the interview guide still remains as the basis of the interview, the general direction and rhythm of it can be adapted to each respondent and their answers, once again, allowing them to guide the direction of the research.

### ***Sampling***

Next, it was necessary to select and conduct the sampling and recruit participants. Due to the nature of the research, which focuses on the representation in entertainment media

of the LGBTQ+ community as a whole - not just on a specific queer identity, but on all the letters of the acronym -, I decided to have as the single sample profile requirement, the interviewees having to identify as queer or a member of the community.

Furthermore, the queer community is in it of itself, a very big and diverse group. This diversity transpires not only in matters of gender identity and sexuality, but also in other areas regarding age, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, class, and cultural background. All these aspects contribute, as previously mentioned, to very distinct identities, perspectives and life experiences, which in turn, affect how they perceive and interpret the world in general, and media specifically.

As such, I decided that the best approach would be to use maximum variation sampling, which is also known as heterogeneous or diversity sampling. This involves seeking and selecting participants from diverse backgrounds, who represent a very broad range of characteristics and standpoints. This would allow me to paint a more complete and nuanced picture of the LGBTQ+ community and its diverse nature. It is also important to note that, although heterogeneity is often perceived as an issue in small samples, due to the high degree of variation it presents amongst individuals, “*The maximum variation sampling turns this problem into the strength by looking into common patterns that emerge from variation in a program.*” (Shaheen, Pradhan and Ranajee, 2019, pp. 30-31)

By using maximum variation sampling, I would be able to get a broader and more encompassing picture and perspective of the queer community as a whole, being that it is particularly “*useful for capturing uniqueness, and the shared patterns that differentiate cases from each other*” (Shaheen, Pradhan and Ranajee, 2019, pp. 30). This was particularly important because, through this research project, I proposed to enhance the voices of marginalized minorities and, as Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory previously illustrated, there are marginalized minorities even within marginalized minority groups. A black, gay man from South America will, undoubtedly, have a rather different experience from the one of a white, bisexual woman from Central Europe.

Therefore, by platforming and inserting these different voices and perspectives into my research, I am able to both construct and extract a richer, more layered and complex analysis and conclusion from this research, but also, contribute to the enhancement of marginalized voices in academia and media. These are also particularly important points because, as Harding (1992) stated, the lives and experiences of those that are placed at

the bottom of social hierarchies, can play an important role in opening up conversations, or serve as a starting point for academic researches, which highlight human relationships with one another and the world. This happens because these marginalized groups perspectives of their own lives, and experiences “*provide particularly significant problems to be explained or research agendas.*” (Harding, 1992, p. 442 - 443).

When it came to the recruitment process, the best and most efficient available option was snowballing sampling. This method’s usefulness when it comes to research of closed or informal social groupings, such as the queer community, “*where the social knowledge and personal recommendations of the initial contacts are invaluable in opening up and mapping tight social networks.*” (Deacon et al., 2021, p. 66-67), made it so it was the best option for this project.

Nevertheless, despite its convenience, the use of snowball sampling did come with its drawbacks, more specifically, in regard to the diversity factor. On the one hand, having new participants be recommended and signaled by acquaintances or other participants, made the process of recruiting much quicker and easier. Likewise, by being connected through trusted people, it made it possible to create a more comfortable space and environment in which participants could share their views and experiences safely.

On the other hand, acquaintances and participants recommended people from within their circles, meaning, people who shared the same interests, backgrounds, or identity labels. This meant that, 7/10 of the respondents identified as bisexual; 7/10 were white Caucasian; 6/10 identified as female, and all of them were in their twenties. Also, 8/10 were born and raised in the European Union, being that, despite the fact that the remaining two are from East Asia and South America, they have lived within this same European Union space for short periods of time.

Naturally, these factors affected the final results, making them more uniform. Despite this, enough variation was achieved within the sample, and common codes were still able to be identified, which made it possible to validate the research’s findings.

## **Coding**

Once the sampling and recruitment process were complete, a pilot interview was conducted through videocall, in order to test the interview guide that had previously been



designed. This interview guide was then reviewed – being that, one of the questions that was used in the pilot interview was removed, due to there being two questions that were too similar -, and used for all the consequent interviews, which, apart from one, were all conducted through videocall, and recorded. Next, each interview was transcribed and coded line by line, using a color coding highlighting technique, this way codes could be more easily identified and grouped.

Although extensive notes were taken during the interviews, the coding of sentence by sentence of the interview transcripts “*ensures that each part of the data is treated the same way, and thus that representative and also new and unexpected themes may be captured*” (Rivas, 2018, p.881). This process allowed me to, by using Rivas coding method, first identify, compare and group open codes from all the interviews, and then start forming categories and groups. It is important to note that this is an essential step since, “*The function of category development is to systematically group multiple fragments of unconnected literal codes into something meaningful and more analytical and digestible*” (Rivas, 2018, p.888). Thereupon, once these categories were formed, it was possible to identify and establish the main thematic codes, which would ground and legitimize the analysis and findings.

## **Ethical Concerns**

Finally, it is important to mention the ethical concerns that arose from this research project, and what measurements were taken to prevent, or mitigate any issues that might arise from them. Firstly, the fact that this research focuses on marginalized minority groups, which are still at risk of prejudice or violent attacks, made it so maintaining and securing the anonymity of the participants, as well as that of the information shared by them, was of the utmost importance.

In order to assure this, the names, and specific identifying traits of the respondents were fully omitted from any document. Likewise, all the recordings and transcripts, were kept out of online clouds and instead, saved in an external flash memory drive. Furthermore, each participant was sent a consent form, that requested their permission to record and use the information collected in the interview for this thesis, which they then had to sign and forward back in order to assure informed consent was secured.

Finally, due to the fact that this study was conducted with the aim of raising and highlighting queer voices and perspectives, as previously mentioned, using Harding's "bottom-up" approach, I chose to use as many direct quotes from the interviews as possible. By using subjects exact words, instead of paraphrasing them, I am able to better present and capture the nuances in their answers and perspectives, while also highlighting their specific voices without, in a way, inserting my own perception and interpretation as a researcher. Furthermore, by not rewriting what was said, I am able to avoid any unethical and biased distortion of the analytical material. On this subject, it is important to note that, two of the interviews were conducted in Portuguese thus, the quotes used in this paper from these specific conversations, are translations of the original Portuguese text.

## **Analysis**

This thesis will be looking into how queer people from different backgrounds, and identities view queer representation on-screen. How do they perceive the content that is being produced about queer people, it's accuracy, its fallacies, and how they wish to be represented. Moreover, this analysis will be drawing the focus particularly towards media featuring the intersection of queerness and criminality and, once again, looking to assess how this intersection is viewed by the queer community. If they believe it to be accurate and of value for LGBTQIA+ people. For this effect, a series of ten semi-structured interviews with ten different queer people were conducted, and thereupon coded.

For a more cohesive read, the analysis has been divided into three main sections. Starting from an analysis of the monolithic representation on screen, the first section focuses on the lack of diversity of experiences and identities represented in entertainment media. How it often perpetuates stereotypes and alienates the majority of the community. In turn, the second section looks to focus on the ways in which the LGBTQIA+ group have been represented, and wishes to be represented, how they wish to see their own lived, unique, and diverse experiences portrayed accurately, and sensibly on-screen. Finally, the last section will look at queerness and crime in media, more specifically, what are the views and opinions of the community on the matter of representing LGBTQIA+ individuals in media as criminals.

## **Projected Identity**

### ***The Screen as a Mirror***

When talking about queer identities, it is important to recognize their complexity, diversity and fluid nature, as well as, how complicated of a process it can be for queer individuals to understand their own gender and sexual identity, inside a heteronormative cultural context (Martinez, 2021, p.2). Consequently, when faced with complex feelings of “otherness”, and of not being able to relate with the people and standards around them, often times, young queer people look into media as a way to look for people that look,

feel and behave like them, but also, to try to better understand themselves. When LGBTQIA+ people find themselves in environments where queerness is not normalized, or more importantly visible, media becomes their safe port, the place where they are able to feel less alone and misunderstood (Kohen, 2016). Through tv or film, “isolated” queer individuals, or individuals still on their self-realization journey, are able to find comfort and, in a way, community.

“It sometimes feels like a weird form of narcissism to look for myself in the media that I engage with, but I want to have that feeling of “Wow, someone else put my feelings into words, someone else managed to encapsulate something about myself, that maybe I’ve struggled with, or maybe feel insecure about. I think it’s always easier to see your flaws in someone else and like, accept them.” (Interviewee #10)

When asked about what role entertainment media, more specifically, what role did TV series and movies featuring queer characters and stories played in the life of LGBTQIA+ people, an interviewee said that,

“First of all, it gives them an opportunity to see themselves represented and gives them something to relate to, and it can help them identify who they are. A lot of the time, if you’ve never been exposed to queer media, or to queer friends, or just what it means to be queer, you might not understand yourself, you might be like, “Oh, I feel different to others!”, but you might not quite understand who you are. So, seeing someone like you represented, and saying “This is who I am, and this is how I like to describe myself.”, can make you feel like it’s more acceptable to be open, and you kind of understand yourself better. It can also lead to being more accepted in more straight society.” (Interviewee #4)

This raises several points on both, the manner in which queer identities are constructed and evolve, as well as the role that media plays in this process. According to Hall (1996), the notion of identity is a key concept which operates “*‘under erasure’ in the interval between reversal and emergence*” (p.2). This is a concept which stands at the center of several key conversations. As such, by analyzing how media helps to construct queer identities, more specifically, those of its members, and how said media’s mirroring of queer experiences affects LGBTQIA+ people, it becomes possible to better understand

its importance on a larger scale, as well as its effects on queer people's media engagement habits.

Consequently, during the interviewing process, participants were asked a series of questions relating to their engagement with queer centric/featuring media: whether they had any preference towards it; if there was any content that they were particularly fond of; what was it that attracted them to pieces of media that had queer stories and characters; and what they believed set LGBTQIA+ focused media apart from other genres. Their answers demonstrated a clear preference towards content that had some sort of queerness featured in it, either that or, the content presented some sort of plot point, character arc, personality or identity trait that they could relate to, identify with, and see themselves in. To be more specific, the motivation for this preference was attributed to the need to empathize with, and relate to the characters and stories portrayed.

“If you can't relate, even to some small aspects, you can't have some sort of empathy to the fights those characters are going through, I find it very, very boring, that kind of thing.” (Interviewee #1)

Another interviewee also mentioned how,

“if you have that kind of commonality, if you have that kind of experience, if you can strongly connect to it, you tend to follow along with the characters more, you're going to feel more empathy and sympathy for them, you know, if you can see yourself in them?” (Interviewee #5)

On the other hand, *“in a society where representation is power, the media exercise considerable control over which groups will be considered significant.”* (Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald, 2000, p.741). This means that, for a marginalized minority group such as the LGBTQIA+ community, media visibility represents a not so common affordance. Consequently, a greater level of attachment and appreciation towards the content that they do get can be denoted. Mentions of how seeing their identities and their stories on-screen, seeing people that looked like them, felt like them, and faced the same struggles as them, gave them, not only a sense of catharsis, but also made them feel accepted.

“I want to, you know, feel seen, and I want to feel represented in all of this. So I believe that everyone, you know, like everyone at the end of the day just wants to be accepted and everyone just wants to be loved. And, you know, going after this sort of media just serves the purpose of, you know, feeling represented, and feeling like there's more people with a similar story to mine.” (Interviewee #2)

In the same way, the choice of this type of media is justified “*because, I couldn't be that child. I couldn't be that teenager. So obviously I'm drawn to it, because of the simple fact that, I'm sort of living through them.*” (Interviewee #8). As such, there were two main incentives named by participants to “justify” their preference towards LGBTQIA+ centric, or featuring media. On the one hand, this experience of feeling disconnected with their LGBTQIA+ identity at earlier stages of their lives and thus, using media as a channel through which they are able to vicariously live through the formative experiences they were not able to have as children or teenagers. On the other, they saw it as a means to feel more comfortable within their queerness. Indeed, this was the experience of Interviewee #10 which reflected on how, the lack of bisexual representation in media shaped her relationship with her sexuality, saying:

“I think if I had the experience of seeing that around as a child, I would've felt less forced to go back into the closet, and I would've saved myself six years of denial. So, I strongly believe that the media had a massive effect, and will continue to have a massive effect, which I think is why representation is so important.”

Finally, it is important to highlight, how the lack of good representation can, and has, influenced LGBTQIA+ individuals, and how good representation can positively shape and influence this community's experiences. Whilst Interviewee #5 claimed that “*my perception of what was on Tv, and how I saw myself, were two completely different realities.*”, Interviewee #2 talked about how “*we now have a lot more truthful portrayals of our reality, and I feel much more connected, and much more seen, and I actually feel like it could be me.*”. These statements can also be seen and interpreted, through the lens of diversity of representation, or lack thereof, as both these answers came from participants with two very different profiles. Whilst Interviewee #5 was an East-Asian, bisexual woman, Interviewee #2 was a White, bisexual man. Yet, this question will be expanded upon in the next section, where the question of quality and diversity of representation will be explored in more depth.

## **Alienating Representation**

### *One Size Fits All? – The Intersections of Queerness On-Screen*

When looking at the scope and diversity within the sphere of queer representation on-screen, it is nearly impossible to not notice how standardized and homogenous it looked, and in a way for the most part, continues to look. The majority of the faces that get to be featured on film or TV, that are used to represent LGBTQIA+ people, look white, male and gay. Even when talking about some of the most popular queer shows and movies of the last decade, we can notice a clear pattern of white gay men being overly represented in media. Shows like *Heartstopper* (2022), which was mentioned by nearly every interviewee, or a movie like *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), also very popular amongst the interviewees, have at their very center two white, queer men. Despite this, several of the interviewees recognize that, a lot of progress has been made in this area,

“It’s been getting better in the last few years, and there’s more representation, and more nuanced representation as well, and it’s not just like, here’s one gay man, and he’s also white and cis, and here’s your representation, we don’t care that it is accurate or not.” Interviewee #7

As we have discussed before, the prevalence of white, gay representation, is not an accurate representation of the LGBTQIA+ group, only a small fraction of it. Thus, this pattern of overlooking the multiplicity of identities present within the community, only serves to further alienate the majority of queer people, at the same time that it projects a monolithic image of it. As stated by Kohen (2016), “*equating queer visibility with gay and lesbian identities is a limited and limiting conceptualization of a spectrum that includes a broader group of people, places, and ways of life.*” (p. 3). On this subject, Interviewee #10 mentioned how she wished to see more of,

“Just intersectionality, like sort of how queerness might be for black people, how queerness might be for disabled people like, there are so many intersections that could be explored but we mostly see white queer men, white gay men specifically.”

Likewise, Interviewee #4 talks about how,

“The difference of experience of being queer needs to be accurately shown on-screen for it to be understood and accepted I think, because you can’t just say “If you’re queer, you act like this, because this white person who is queer acts like this. One person isn’t going to be accurate representation of a whole community, you need to look into intersections to get an accurate representation of the queer community as a whole.”

In fact, the subject of intersectionality, came up several times throughout the interviews, even before I asked the participants about it. In several points, the interviewees went into the subject of multiple diversity within the community, and how underrepresented and misrepresented so many identities were. When asked about what aspects of the LGBTQIA+ group they believed were overlooked or unexplored in entertainment media, the majority mentioned how “*when it comes to a lot more niche sexualities, or the more radical concepts of queerness, then we still have a long way to go.*” (Interviewee #9).

On this subject, Interviewee #7 talked about how, “*especially being trans, being non-binary, being gender non-conforming in any way, is something that is not so well understood for mainstream audiences.*”. Not only that but, other queer labels such as asexual, aromantic, non-binary, or intersex are mostly ignored by creative people behind the scenes according to Interviewees #2 and #10. This can be particularly detrimental for young queer people still trying to understand their identity, as it narrows the visible options available to them. One of the participants shared their own experience with media serving as a pipeline towards realizing their sexuality saying that, “*The lack of bisexual representation in media had a direct effect on me not thinking that was real, and a valid identity I could have.*” (Interviewee #10).

When addressing the issue of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) went into how, the refusal to allow multiply-disadvantaged people to play a part in representing the singularly-disadvantaged people of their communities, hindered and blocked any effort towards adjusting established hierarchies, and thus restructuring access to opportunities and visibility (p.145). So why is this erasure of entire subsections, and identities of the



LGBTQIA+ community from on-screen media such a prevalent phenomenon? One of the reasonings given by the participants for the commonness of this phenomenon was that,

“there’s a tendency to try to stick with what we know, in the sense of, it’s a little more common, it’s a little more well known as well, being gay, bi, even pan is more of a mainstream thing people recognize as a “label”.” (Interviewee #2)

Another interviewee went on to talk about how, this familiarity created a sense of comfort amongst straight audiences, that gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities did not disrupt the *status quo* the same way gender non-conforming people did. As long as specific gays, lesbians and bisexuals are able to meet the other requirements tied to heteronormativity (namely racial, class, and family model), they can be symbolically included in the society (Kohen, 2016, p.28). The so-called homonormative describes, according to Kohen (2026), “*non-heterosexual identifications and ways of life that intersect with heterosexual ones in ways that do not challenge the overarching demands of heteronormativity.*” (p. 26).

Unlike gay, lesbian or bisexual individuals, gender non-conforming people are not able to meet these homonormative standards. On the contrary, they push straight audiences into this uncomfortable, and unfamiliar position of having to readjust the way they understand their own gender, and the way society itself is built on strict binary standards (Interviewee #8). One of the interviewees went as far as to say that,

“Critical productions made in media, in relation to the queer experience made by a drag queen for example, would never be allowed to really hit the mainstream. They have a sort of complexity, social awareness and intellectual value that would be too complex to be understood by “outside” audiences. In a way, you could say that media itself is the one creating marginalization.” (Interviewee #3)

However, it is important to recognize that there is no “one” queer experience, people are made up of multiple different and fluid identities, being that their queerness is only one of them. “*Being queer is such a complex experience like, nothing exists by itself.*” (Interviewee #8). Even though “*Certain things can be universal but, it doesn’t mean that we cannot criticize the lack of diversity in representation.*” (Interviewee #9). In fact, the

lack of visibility granted to queer people of color specifically, was extensively discussed by the participants during their interviews. They mentioned how, by choosing to focus mostly on the white queer experience, creators and producers were erasing the very complex and distinct experience of LGBTQIA+ individuals of color, an experience much different from that of their white counterparts. Not only that but, when also taking into account matters of disability or, as previously mentioned, gender identity, we find that in reality, the representation of the LGBTQIA+ community on-screen does not truly paint an accurate picture of what the community actually looks like.

“I think there’s, in general, a lack of representation for people of color in media, and if you intersect that with even more factors like queerness for instance, disability, or gender identity,... I think there are so many layers to it that are neglected, and I think that maybe there’s an hesitation around it but, those people also exist, and they also deserve to have a place. So, I think that’s why it is missing from the media because, it feels like it could almost come across as a caricature, “How marginalized can I make this person?”, when in reality, people are multiply marginalized.” (Interviewee #10)

But why is the recognition of this lack of diversity in representation important? Well, according to Interviewee #9 the main reason why this matters is because, “*We do live in a world where being seen is being accepted so there is that.*”. And, as we’ve seen, this is particularly important when talking about marginalized groups. This is because, media teaches audiences and the public, how to perceive or empathize with said groups, both negatively and positively, either encouraging an understanding of the marginal queer experience, or doing the exact opposite (Campbell and Carilli, 2013, p.43).

This means that, media representation can, as previously mentioned, serve as a way to combat prejudice and help establish a better understanding of these marginalized minorities, within larger societal structures and amongst audiences. Or by contrast, serve as a device to further marginalize them. In fact, conceptions of what could, or should be considered “right or wrong”, “natural or unnatural”, are presented in media through the sheer act of representation. Thus, the types of messages that are passed through this representation, particularly in the case of ostracized communities, can have intense negative effects on these minority’s group members (Gurtie, et al, 2013, p. 21), or the other way around.

“Mainstream media could have such a huge impact on changing how being trans and non-binary is being perceived for mainstream central audiences, and I feel like they’re missing an opportunity there.” (Interviewee #6)

Once queer individual’s dissatisfaction towards the lack of diversity in media is established, and the power that on-screen representations of marginalized groups can have in shaping their experience in society is recognized, the question that is now raised focuses on what kind of representation do queer people wish to see. Also, how do they perceive the queer content that has been produced and distributed?

### ***“Bad Publicity is Still Publicity!”***

Whilst addressing the subject of quality of LGBTQIA+ centric, or featuring content, the results were rather surprising. Although there was a recognition of the inaccuracy, and poor quality of a lot of the queer media that has been produced in the last few decades, that took to stereotypes to portray complex people, several participants went on to, in a way, defend some of this media. In one of the interviews, one participant mentioned how, when talking about queer representation,

“It always comes down to how they chose to represent it, because you can have a great idea and be terrible at executing that idea. It’s always good to have representation, it’s like that saying, *Bad publicity is still publicity.*” (Interviewee #1)

Authors such as Harwood and Roy (2005, cited in Gurthie, et al., 2013, p.20-21) defend that, representation is more so a matter of quality rather than quantity, due to how cognitive depictions of specific communities can be perpetuated, and consequently, might affect the in-group’s self-esteem and identification. In turn, several interviewees believed that, sometimes, having a lot of representation, even if not up to standard, could have positive repercussions. They talked about how by making queer people visible, it was possible to “normalize” their presence in society, and in many ways, give them a voice by opening doors. Parallels with the black community were established on this matter,

with one participant talking about how, *“bringing their narratives to the public is essential, it is a little bit like with the black community who managed to get a voice once they made themselves seen.”* (Interviewee #2).

In regard to the quality of the material being produced and released, a participant had to say that,

“There was always going to be some very good representation, and then there’s always going to be like, people that don’t understand good representation; and there’s going to be just very bad representation, and then sometimes, any kind of representation will be beneficial.” (Interviewee #1)

Likewise, Interviewee #8 went on to reflect on the fact that,

“We did not use to have any explicit representation, it was almost like we were kept hidden, but now, even though it is not always the best at least we have something, at least people are not afraid to use the words.”

This is a point of view also shared by Radecki (2018), who mentions how, despite their flawed nature, and at times even offensive, there is something rather powerful in being able to see LGBTQIA+ characters being portrayed on-screen. They talk about how, growing up queer teaches individuals to look for themselves in the media they consume whilst making the most out of the few crumbs they are given. It’s about learning how to project your own self, onto any queer character you can find, regardless of gender, race or sexual identity. But also, *“it’s about learning to construct our fictional identities from scratch, like assembling a jigsaw, out of the imperfect versions we’ve been given.”* (Radecki, 2018).

Not only that but, when talking about “bad” representation, one of the points raised during the interview process was that *“even a bad representation can, eventually be very good to open up the discussion, and that will be positive, off course.”* (Interviewee #1). Meaning, the depiction of queerness in an inaccurate, stereotyped, or unflattering manner, can actually, serve as a propeller for starting discussions on themes relating to the LGBTQIA+ community, through the sheer force of indignation, particularly within the social media realm. There have been several instances of fans or audience members,

taking to social media platforms to showcase their discontentment towards media representation, when being confronted with poor quality portrayals. This in turn, brought “niche” issues regarding minorities struggles to a mainstream public.

However, despite this recognition of the power in numbers and being made visible, plenty of critiques regarding the quality, and scope of the representation offered to queer people were pointed out, and reflected on during the interviews. Once again, with participants mentioning how stereotypical depictions of minorities can be a rather dangerous territory, with real life implications. Even though they acknowledged the role “bad” representation played in the process of opening doors, it does not mean they do not wish to see a shift towards “good” portrayals, portrayals that serve the community in a positive and accurate manner, portrayals that do not take to stereotypes and the repurposing of straight narratives to queer contexts.

### ***Stereotyping and Recycling***

Although every single participant acknowledged that the type of queer representation that has been produced in the past few years, and that has reached a wider mainstream audience, has improved massively in comparison to that of decades prior, they also acknowledged that a lot of work still needs to be done. One of the main qualms participants had with much of the content being released, that featured LGBTQIA+ characters was that, *“they tend to fall into a lot of stereotypes, a lot of tokenisms.”* (Interviewee #6). It was with how much they took to tired, inaccurate, and at times offensive stereotypes to portray the community.

This idea has been extensively supported by numerous authors, particularly, Campbell and Carilli (2013) talked about how the use of stereotypes in media, which ails all minorities, presents caricatured versions of members of these marginalized groups (p.43). Likewise, Larry Gross (2001, cited in Campbell and Carilli, 2013) goes even further, touching on how queer people’s *“vulnerability to media stereotyping and political attack derives in large part from our isolation and pervasive invisibility”* (p. 42)

By having a single LGBTQIA+ character introduced into a narrative, and surrounding them with cisgender, heterosexual characters, producers were able to, according to the

interviewees, claim to have representation in their shows or movies. This representation, although, fell short amongst the community, both due to the lack of fleshing out and humanizing of these queer characters, through the use of stereotypes to shape them. But also, through adopting heterosexual, gender binary norms to write their stories. This idea has actually, been supported by authors such as Campbell and Carilli (2013) who defend that, the majority of mainstream films continue to promote hegemonic, patriarchal, heterosexist ideals. Not only that but, even when queerness is allowed on-screen, it is still subject to the past stereotypes of the “*villains, monsters, and victims, or queers appear in supporting, tangential, often buffoonish roles.*” (p.51)

When asked if they felt like the queer centric/featuring media being released was being produced for the queer community, the answer was unanimously “no”. One participant stated that, the producers try to “*please everyone, so they make these movies or these series where it's like, it's a little bit gay, but not too much gay, because if it's too much gay we won't appeal to every audience.*” (Interviewee #2). Not only that but,

“with this tendency of the BL<sup>3</sup> rising as a genre itself, definitely made by straight women, for straight women, and it's very hard for them, for example, to let go of this idea of a more masculine person and of a more feminine person, for them to understand that it is two men, you know? And it's a relationship between two men, and that's what makes it gay.” (Interviewee #1)

In fact, when looking at many of the LGBTQIA+ content available, it is possible to denote a pattern, a pattern of “hetero-washing” queer stories and experiences. The focus on traditional gender binary roles and dynamics within relationships is, perhaps, the most glaring form of misunderstanding of queer experiences in media. Rarely is it possible to find “*complex circumstances in texts, spectators, and production that resist easy categorization, but that definitely escape or defy the heteronormative*” (Doty, 2002, p.7). Whilst addressing the topic of using heteronormative standards to tell queer stories, Interviewee #3 reflected on how,

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<sup>2</sup> BL refers to “Boys' love, a genre of fictional media originating in Japan that features homoerotic relationship between male characters.” (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019)

“They try to reproduce heteronormative couples, to adapt heteronormative norms, and to recycle heteronormative narratives into LGBT stories, when the community frequently has very different lifestyles. They disrespect matters of pronouns or gender expression, and lack understanding in regard to queer identities and their own specific uniqueness.”

Hence, the complexity of the media portrayals of queerness, and queer realities is flattened to meet straight audience’s standards. As referred to by Guthrie, et. al (2013), the challenges faced by the writers of the content being produced and released lays on the fact that, they ought to take into account, not only the interests of the group being portrayed, but also matters of profitability, marketability and viewership (p. 27). Consequently, the quality of the representation is the first one to suffer, as in businesses such as this, profit takes precedent over everything else, and in this case, the main source of profit would be straight audiences.

According to interviewees, the addition of queer side characters to pieces of media, is often used as a means of “*just money grabbing and trying to like, rear queer people in.*” (Interviewee #10). Either through queerbaiting, or bad stereotypical representation as previously noted, producers found a sort of “cheat way” around representing the LGBTQIA+ community – thus appealing to this group -, without having to alienate their straight audiences – their main source of income.

“Even queer baiting, where they kind of have undertext that they are queer, but they don’t actually give them a fully fleshed out relationship. They’re like, “Here you go! Here it is!”, but then they’ve got like, no actual kind of, relationship, or identity, or expression of their queerness. It’s a way to just try to draw in like, that kind of queer watchers, but not actually showing their experience, just as a part of the plot-text.” (Interviewee #4)

This pattern also resulted in the isolation of LGBTQIA+ characters in media, more specifically, by placing them as the only queer individual within a story. Yet, as we’ve seen before, that is not the reality of the queer experience, queer people seek community, they seek people with identities similar to theirs to connect with. This idea of community search can be found in the previously discussed Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory which defends precisely this idea that, individuals define their own personhood according to the group they identify with, using it as a way to solidify self-

identity. According to Guthrie, et. al (2013), this idea can also be “*utilized as a lens to help us explain how viewers with various identities identify with and gain pleasure from viewing media.*” (p. 20).

Once again, a concept such as this takes an even more important role when discussing marginalized minorities. So, to have “*those lone, queer characters, where they just exist in straight spaces and it’s just them and no one else, I think that’s not good representation because we flock together.*” (Interviewee #9). On this subject, Interviewee #4 talked about how:

“A couple of years ago you had a gay character at the sideline, and honestly, most people that I’ve seen will seek out other queer people, it will be a queer friend group of five. You know, queer people, we don’t exist by ourselves, we seek that community.”

On a more specific note, when talking about more specific character stereotypes and archetypes, in six of the ten interviews conducted, participants referred back to how often queer characters, particularly bisexual ones, were portrayed as promiscuous and prone to infidelity, and how this had a direct effect in people’s perceptions of them. This group’s approach to relationships is often portrayed through indecisiveness, or objectification, being that, media often highlights a sort of threatening, insatiable, and prone to excesses nature in the bisexual characters it depicts (Klesse, 2011, p. 232).

A clear example of this phenomenon, can be observed in season 3, episode 4 of the HBO hit series *Sex and the City* (2000), where the protagonist Carrie meets a group of bisexual people, who have all had sex with one another, implying their sexual freedom and promiscuity. Significantly, two of the participants noted how this stereotype had negatively impacted their personal lives.

“They just portray queer characters as very sexual people that are always into hooking up and having sex with everyone. There’s a lot of this tokenism in a lot of these representations, with all sort of stereotypes, you know? Like the bisexual person, which is always the one that doesn’t know what they want, and always wants to be in threesomes, and hook up with guys and girls” (Interviewee #2)



Another prevalent stereotype was that of the solo gay best friend, or solo queer side character. A prevalent trope during the late 90's all the way to the 2010's, the presence of a one-dimensional queer, background character, was seen by the interviewees as a clear sign of tokenism. This was also a way for production companies to have queer representation without having to fully commit to actually portraying queer people. One interviewee talked about how,

“I felt like sometimes, some shows, or some movies were trying to fill in quotas, like diversity quotas. So, like the main character is the straight white men, or a straight white woman, and then they would have like, a black best friend, or a gay best friend, or a side character who is not, you know, like those heteronormative, cis, white stereotypes.” (Interviewee #6)

### ***Tired Tropes***

Another point of contention regarding the representation of queerness laid by the participants, was the type of storylines and plot devices used to tell their stories. From the “*randomly placed queer man, a gay man usually, who was making a coming out.*” (Interviewee #7), to the “*deaths, so many deaths! There's the tradition of like, killing them off, or just like, representing them in a negative light.*” (Interviewee #5). Until very recently – and in some cases, still today -, LGBTQIA+ characters in media were afforded one of two stories: the coming out arc, or the suffering one.

As a matter of fact, these are extensively researched tropes which are widely prevalent in queer media, and even have specific names which only serve to testify how often they are featured: the *Coming Out Story*, and *Bury Your Gays Trope*. These tropes focus namely, on the process of a character's “sexuality awakening”. An often arduous and painful journey, and the eventual acceptance and revelation of their sexuality or gender identity in a “coming out” process. Or another option is, the “forced coming out”, where a queer character's sexual orientation or gender identity, is exposed against their will in a violent and non-consensual way. Even though most critics recognize how this “coming out” discourse - when done according to the individual's will -, can serve to empower and unify the queer movements, they also acknowledge that the idea of the closet is deceptive. They mention how it perpetuates pervasive misconceptions on foundational categories of

identity, agency and knowledge (Bobker, 2015, p. 34). Moreover, in this regard, one of the interviewees also touched on an idea that feeds onto the alienation, and isolation of queer people,

“This idea of like, your sexual identity has to be a struggle, you have to struggle, you have to almost like, not want it at first because it’s like, a bad thing almost, it’s like having to accept a disease or something.” (Interviewee #1)

Secondly, the *Bury Your Gays* trope, which was initially used by authors to write about queer characters, whilst still avoiding coming under fire for endorsing queerness due to anti-queer legislation, which we’ve previously touched on, can still be seen all over our screens today (Hulan, 2017). In their work, *Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context*, Hulan (2017) talks about how this trope causes the death of LGBTQIA+ characters in stories, often right after they have engaged in any sort of queer affirming acts, such as confessing their feelings, kissing, or having sex (p. 17). By establishing this association between death and queerness, creators and producers are ignoring the real-life consequences of media portrayals and representation of ostracized minorities. They are projecting the idea that, not complying to heteronormative and cisgender norms is deserving of punishment.

This trope can in fact, be found in several iconic, and formative pieces of queer media, such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) or *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999). Notably, it was also mentioned by Interviewee #5, which brought up the case of the popular series *Killing Eve* (2018), and how the killing of one of the protagonists reinforced the idea that queerness is “wrong” saying:

“Eve was portrayed as very straight until Villenelle “changed her”, or made her discover her true self or whatever, and then they killed Villenelle so she can return to her normal life. That’s what they want to convey, right?”

When referring to the oversaturated use of these tropes, interviewees mentioned how “every show is the same, it is like they have a formula.” (Interviewee #5), a formula that traps queer people in these overplayed, sensationalistic, recycled storylines. They claimed

to be tired of “*all of this drama, there's no need for all of these stories where they are going to end up apart, or one of them dies.*” (Interviewee #8), the same way that they are tired of, seeing their struggles, and their pain consistently exploited for profit. Another interviewee reflected on how, perhaps, these dramatic narratives might be also be a bi-product of “*distributors feeling the need to justify the presence of LGBT characters in their content, so they overexploit their darkest parts to make their content more appealing.*” (Interviewee #3).

They mention how seeing their traumatic experiences being repeatedly exploited on-screen can be rather triggering. How “*One thing that I really cannot deal with anymore is queer suffering.*” (Interviewee #9). Having had to deal with homophobic people throughout their lives, they claim to be tired, and to not be into seeing that portrayed in the media they engage with. One interviewee warned about portraying this type of stories, and how “*you have to be very careful, we've all been there and it's too traumatizing sometimes.*” (Interviewee #1).

There is a pattern of not allowing queer characters to have a happy ending, to have them go through struggles and pain, to exploit the particular adversities faced by them. A pattern that passes a message about queerness that, LGBTQIA+ people “*could even be happy for a moment, but at the end of the day, that [being queer] would still be wrong.*” (Interviewee #6). Despite agreeing that,

“These stories are important. Obviously, we have to talk about this because, this is the life of a lot of queer people, but if we still reinforce the stereotypes, these norms, if we still tell these narratives, these stories, we are just going to be you know, like saying to young people to young queer people especially, like “You’re not okay, you’re not accepted! You cannot be who you are.”” (Interviewee #2)

Even though it is “*getting better with time, and some shows are better than others, I think some try to exploit the queer community instead of helping them.*” (Interviewee #4). Recognizing progress does not equate to overlooking the flaws, and the work that still needs to be done, in fact, it shows that progress is possible and that with enough pressure, positive change can be achieved, as stated by Interviewee #10, “*If there isn't a seat at the table, we'll make our own table.*”.

“There are so many nuances in the experiences, that I think representation just hasn’t gotten right yet. So, I don’t think representation is where I would like it to be, or where I think the community should be at this point.” (Interviewee #4)

But what exactly is the type of change and progress that the community wishes to see? How do they wish to see their stories and experiences be portrayed on-screen? And how would good representation of the LGBTQIA+ community look like?

### ***Normal Heart – The Yearning for Quiet Queerness***

When reflecting on the media depictions of LGBTQIA+ people, more specifically, on the type of media depictions that they wished to see on-screen, that they believe would feel like a more faithful portrayal of the LGBTQIA+ people and experience, the general consensus amongst the interviewees was that, queer people should be represented as just that, people. Despite recognizing the diversity of experiences within this group, participants talked at length about how, most of the times, they wished their stories were told as any other stories. They mentioned how they wished queer characters were represented as complex people, who’s defining trait is not their queerness. They talked about how,

“It’s almost this big gray thing where their main personality trait is them being queer, that is really just annoying to me, that is just one part of me, it doesn’t have to be everything that I am.” (Interviewee #1)

“I’m always happy when shows or movies have queer characters that are just queer because they’re queer, and not because it’s a huge plot point.” (Interviewee #7)

This yearning for being acknowledged and recognized as fully fleshed, complex, and diverse people, with normal lives and desires, and not as this “other”, living on the outskirts of society, whose life is filled with trials and turbulations, was at the center of interviewees conception of “good” representation. They talked about how, “*we’re forgetting that after all, we’re all longing for the same things, we’re looking at the world*

*differently but, what we need in society is exactly the same.*” (Interviewee #9). Even though there are differences, and particular nuances that distinguish queer experiences from straight ones, at the core they are all humans looking for acceptance and connection.

As such, participants pointed out how much they enjoyed shows like *Heartstopper* (2022), *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), or *Killing Eve* (2018), due to the way they treated their queer characters and their storylines as just “normal”, natural, without having it be the focus of the plot, as well as due to their quiet representation of queerness.

“I feel like now we are walking into a path where it's being, you know, treated like I don't know, like, just people, like for example, *Heartstopper* for me, it's just one of those.” (Interviewee #7)

“That is why *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is such a good example because, you weren't expecting it, it was nothing that was very grand in the plot, it was not just about them being gay, it was about them being people, you know what I mean?” (Interviewee #1)

“*Killing Eve* is not really about being gay, it's about how humans come together. It's not like the producer tried to put them together, it came together quite nicely, and then it's like really authentic.” (Interviewee #5)

Furthermore, there was a lot of talk in regard to the overblown, and overplayed displays of queer pride exhibited by characters on-screen, how they lacked nuance and felt in many ways, like caricatures of what heteronormative society believed queer people to be. So, between the previously mentioned exploitations of queer suffering, and these caricatures of LGBTQIA+ people, participants claimed there was not much space left for more natural, quiet (and accurate) representations of their experiences as non-heterosexual individuals. This in turn, serves to maintain queer people's status as “other”, and as we have seen previously, the images shown on-screen directly affect the audiences outlook on the groups being depicted.

Consequently, by portraying the LGBTQIA+ characters as more than just queer, by presenting them as complex people, in the same way they do with straight characters, it would be possible, according to the interviewees, to bridge the gap that places queer

people on the edge of society. More specifically, *“What I believe it’s lacking, is this process of normalizing queer people. This process of normalizing through telling their stories.”* (Interviewee #8). As mentioned by Interviewee #7,

“I feel like having accurate representation, would also cut this notion of “the outside group”, “the subversive group”, because there’s obviously, so many cis, straight characters in media, with all types of backgrounds, and interests, and relationships, and living situations, and financial situations, and there’s so many different experiences that, if we had that for queer people as well, with all these different backgrounds, that just happen to be queer, I feel like it would do quite a good job of normalizing queer to a non-queer audience.”

However, as mentioned prior, the matter of profit plays a big role in what kind of material, what kind of stories and narratives get to be produced and released. Consequently, the more quiet, ordinary queer stories end up being relegated to niche, underground productions, or never get to see the light of day. This could also be a result of the lack of queer creatives, with personal knowledge of the lived queer experience, behind the cameras. Consequently, this leaves straight writers and producers with the job of creating and developing these stories. Indeed, this could have negative consequence in the queer integration and normalization agenda, being that one participant went as far as to say that, *“giving heterosexual people the power over LGBT narratives is like handing a gun to an assassin.”* (Interviewee #3).

Actually, the manner in which queer people *“approach their chosen families, their relationships that they have with themselves, with their bodies is just so intrinsically different then the way you see straight creators do”* (Interviewee #9). This in turn, results in the misunderstanding, and misrepresenting of LGBTQIA+ experiences, due to the fact that, straight individuals have a harder time comprehending what good representation entails. In fact, Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald (2000) talk about how even when minority groups are made visible, the ways in which they are represented in media will always be confined to the lens through which the dominant class perceives them (p.742). According to Interviewee #10,

“Good representation is boring, and I think I agree because, good representation would entail that you show a nuanced portrayal of queerness, that also just includes people just being queer, and it not being about coming out, and it not being about the struggle, and it not being about hardships, just characters being queer, being in love stories, being romantically involved with people. That seems, especially to straight audiences, boring because it’s so, let’s say similar to straight stories, but they need that dramatic, sensationalist effect.”

Finally, here is a need to recognize that “*My sexuality is not everything about me, there’s plenty of facets in my life, in my identity.*” (Interviewee #9). Furthermore, by allowing queer creatives of all backgrounds to be responsible for telling queer stories, complex, rich and nuanced queer stories, the same way straight stories are told, it becomes possible to, not only better connect with the LGBTQIA+ community, but also, to “normalize” them and their presence in society.

## **Queering Crime**

### ***Born Criminal***

The question of the association of queerness and criminality on-screen revealed itself to be a rather contentious, and difficult one for this study’s participants. When the question was first presented, most interviewees claimed to be unsure on how to feel about it, and how to interpret this type of portrayal. On the one hand, they talked about how their mostly privileged backgrounds made it difficult to relate, or fully grasp the relation between crime and queerness. However, on the other hand, they still felt like a part of them made it possible to empathize with the queer people who did engage with crime, saying, “*I’ve lived a very privileged life, I didn’t have to struggle, but I can still empathize with them, even though I didn’t have to go through their struggles.*” (Interviewee #7).

As a matter of fact, some of this contention lied mostly on the fear many LGBTQIA+ people have, of being perceived as villains, as bad, untrustworthy people. Also, on the fear that all the progress that has been achieved after so many years of ostracization, of fighting, of being painted as a problematic group, will be lost. There was a fear that, the stories would be interpreted in a negative light, and that non-queer audiences would take

them at face value, and internalize messages that related LGBTQIA+ individuals with criminal misconduct and evilness. As we have seen previously, queer people were for many years, treated as outsiders, as criminals, a feeling that was reflected in the media where they were featured, even if in a connotative manner (Kohen, 2016).

“It is a slippery slope because, there are queer people that are violent, that commit crimes, that are bad people, they exist one hundred per cent, as people do in any sort of demographic. But, I think with the current landscape of representation that we currently have, where we’re not represented well a lot of the time, on a larger scale, I think that association becomes dangerous, because it leads straight people, especially those that already have queerphobic attitudes, it feeds into their ideas of queerness being deviant and something bad.” (Interviewee #10)

This matter becomes even more pertinent when taking into account queer history, and how for so long, engaging in homosexual acts was considered a criminal act punishable by law (Dennis, 2014). With this in mind, it is possible to understand how innately connected the ideas of crime and queerness are, as Interviewee #6 said “*Obviously, there are not a lot of groups in society that, historically speaking, can say my entire existence was criminalized from the moment I could speak.*”. Likewise, another interviewee went on to support this idea stating that,

“Queerness and criminalization always went hand-in-hand up until like, 50 years ago. So, obviously, there is that aspect of, everything that pertained to life as a queer person was inherently illegal, was inherently criminalized. Love itself was criminalized, and not accepted and not considered at all.” (Interviewee #9)

This acknowledgement, did not however, mean this sort of representation could be freed from criticism. Despite being open to the portrayal of stories featuring LGBTQIA+ characters engaging in illegal activity, and even being portrayed as morally grey villains, participants still believed this sort of depictions ought to be done in an extra careful manner. There was an acknowledgement that, “*Queer people are just people. If they’re going to be criminals, they’re going to be criminals.*” (Interviewee #3) and therefore, they ought to be portrayed as the multifaceted group they are.



The question of associating queerness and criminality was also a matter of concern for academics of queer criminology, which worried that opening up the conversation on LGBTQIA+ people as perpetrators of crime, would hurt the community and further stigmatize them (Woods, 2014; Panfil, 2013). On the question, if it is better to leave the matter of queer criminals out of our media screens, as a way to avoid further pushing queer people down the marginalization pipeline, interviewees said that,

“You can actually associate crime with anyone, but I mean, it depends on how you do it, it depends on how you represent the crime. It’s ok to associate crime with gay people, but it’s not ok if you associate crime with gay people when the main message is like, “gay people are criminal”, that is not ok.” (Interviewee #5)

Moreover, interviewees were able to recognize that, there is definitely “*danger in associating those two, even though I also obviously don’t want queer people to be these perfect people that never make any mistakes, but there has to be nuance.*” (Interviewee #10). This meaning that, as long as this type of representation is done in a nuanced, careful way, which does not paint the subjects’ queerness as the reason for their actions, it is valid and can in fact, have value for the larger queer representation agenda. Not only that but, “*Understanding the complexity of that experience, is very important to understanding the queer community, you need to explore the full spectrum of experiences to understand it.*” (Interviewee #6).

In the same way, this idea that, academic conversations about the LGBTQIA+ experience with the criminal system should not be avoided has been defended by Panfil (2013). The author believes they help construct a more complex and complete profile and image of the community, while highlighting both their agency as individuals, as well as the circumstances that shape, and push them into engaging in this behavior, Thus, to ignore this facet of the community, to overlook how it manifests and why, is to, in many ways, make their struggles, circumstances, and in part culture, invisible.

“I don’t think we should sugarcoat anything, I don’t think there’s any value in pretending that those realities don’t exist, and it goes back to the point that good representation is nuanced representation.” (Interviewee #2)

The idea that only the “good queers” should be represented on-screen, that “imperfect” members of the community being involved in uncouth and illegal behavior and acts should not be portrayed, is a rather hurtful one. Firstly, due to the previously mentioned diversity of experiences present within such a heterogenous community. Secondly, due to the hegemonic structures that shape our society, that outcast anyone outside of the white, heteronormative, binary bounds, the LGBTQIA+ community is bound to be faced with challenges and the type of marginalization that can lead to brushes with the law (Peterson and Panfil, 2014). This, however, does not mean that these stories should not be told. As explained by a participant,

“Being queer comes with a lot of different experiences, a lot of different struggles, and you don’t have to be an absolute golden child you know, you don’t have to be like “I’ve never done anything wrong, I’ve never committed any crime, so now you can accept me.”. You can forgive the outcome of the struggle.” (Interviewee #4)

But what does this mean in a more concrete way? How does this connection manifest in the lives of real LGBTQIA+ individuals, and how is its context and actualization portrayed in media?

### *The Necessity of Gay Crime*

As mentioned before, the LGBTQIA+ experience is immensely diverse, with multiple different intersectional identities shaping each, and every queer person’s experience in a multitude of ways. Not only that, but also, the power structures that are in place, and that define what standard individuals must follow to be integrated within society, both affect the community’s involvement with crime. When talking about this subject, as it would happen with any other group, structural factors relating to race, gender, sexuality, and class complicate the ways we look at this relation of queerness and criminality (Peterson and Panfil, 2014). This is due to the ways that, multiply marginalized members of the community will have different experiences within the same hegemonic structures.

“Many within the community are not granted access to opportunities or educational spaces, and I think I don’t need to explain who they would be. It is very obvious how society creates marginalization through policies, which do not protect marginalized minorities in any way, if anything they perpetuate it. And the same happens in media, where a stereotyped notion gets consistently perpetuated.” (Interviewee #3)

This marginalization is pointed out as the primary gateway into crime, as a lack of access and opportunity, and being defined as outsiders can lead to the necessity of trying different avenues of survival, some of them being illegal. A perfect example of these realities being tastefully portrayed on-screen is the FX show *Pose* (2018). Mentioned by four participants, the series stars a diverse cast of LGBTQIA+ people of color, and focuses on the realities of queer subcultures in the 1980s, while also featuring their struggles and how circumstances and prejudices can push one into engaging in illegal work. This idea has been previously touched upon in the literature review, with studies by Peterson and Panfil (2014), Woods (2014), Dennis (2014), Frederick (2014), Ball (2012), and Panfil (2013), all presenting different contexts and environments, where this type of circumstance can take place.

“I think, depending on the circumstances of life in general, and life as it is kind of expected, is harder for queer people, and it is harder to get by, and it is harder to get a job, and an apartment, to lead just a quiet, normal, mainstream life, in a way that’s accepted and expected. So, I think that the pipeline to becoming a criminal out of circumstance is pretty short, depending on other parts of your environment and your upbringing.” (Interviewee #7)

Whilst still, justifiably, demanding that these sort of portrayals be done with care, nuance, and with the input of community members, interviewees still believed this intersection should be explored in media. However, two important points were raised in relation to this sort of depiction, and factors to take into account when producing this sort of stories. First, how it can easily become an exploitation of trauma and suffering; secondly, how, due to their minority status, the portrayal of explicitly queer individuals as criminals can lead to an association in audiences mind of “LGBTQIA+ equals criminal” (Russo, 1981).

When exploring the danger of media becoming a channel for the exploitation of queer struggles and suffering, particularly through their association with crime, an interviewee said that,

“I think there’s been a fascination with ostracization as well, like putting people in the category of the other, and I feel like in today’s society maybe someone just being queer is not othering enough, so you add the layer of “But this person had to fight so hard that they had to do sex work to survive!”, Then it’s like, wow, it is so hard being queer, and that’s just perpetuated in the media. (Interviewee #2)

More specifically, participants felt like there was the risk of creators carelessly exploiting the struggles faced by queer people’s marginalized minority status for content, to make their stories more appealing to “outside” audiences. Although they recognized and believed that, once again telling these stories was necessary, there was some discomfort with having it done by straight producers. This was due to them having no queer lived experience or “skin in the game”, which lead to the material they produced feeling profiteering. As we have seen before, LGBTQIA+ people are more interested in a sort of quiet representation of queerness. So, to see their traumatic experiences being displayed and explored solely for profit, felt to them like a cheap exploitation of the community’s marginal struggles. One interviewee talked about how they felt like,

“There’s still a lot of emphasis on the traumatic parts of the queer experience, and I think a lot of queer people, essentially being forced into criminality because of their circumstances is unfortunately a reality for those that are disadvantaged in society specifically, and media. Also, there’s some intersections with race for instance, so, I think there is an element of realism to that obviously, because it exists. But, I think there is also, especially if there is a production coming from predominantly straight people, I think there’s this fascination with portraying the traumatic and dramatic aspects of the queer experience. I think it is still sensationalized in that way because, we can no longer sensationalize coming out stories, they don’t feel sensational anymore, there needs to be an additional layer.” (Interviewee #10)

In turn, the point regarding media’s power in shaping the public’s perspective, particularly in relation to minority communities, has been explored all throughout this research, and once again, can be applied to this specific case. As we have seen with

Campbell and Carilli (2013), the mistreatment of minority groups in media, conditions viewers to, associate the negative traits that have been presented in relation to the LGBTQIA+ character on-screen, in this case being a criminal. At the same time, it also does not allow audiences to empathize, and understand the stories portrayed. Consequently, there is a very delicate balance that ought to be achieved in order to avoid creating a direct link between “queerness” and “criminality”, particularly for straight audiences. A balance that once broken, runs the risk of painting an entire community as untrustworthy criminals. When it comes to minority groups, when one individual “acts out of line”, “*that person is always used as a scapegoat for the entire community*” (Interviewee #8). In fact, Interviewee #1 perfectly summed up this idea when they said that,

“When a person that is straight does a crime, nobody mentions they’re straight, it’s just a person committing a crime. If a person that is gay does a crime, everybody says that is a gay person that committed the crime, it’s like always, it’s a constant, because there’s this thing of like “Oh, they’re different, I have to mention it!”, and this goes on to mention some other minority groups. We’re ingrained with this sort of idea where, we take the characteristic that we can see from that person, or that we know that person has, and all of a sudden that is the identifying trait of that person, and if it was for example, just a white, seemingly straight person, that was kind of just Christian or something, it wouldn’t be mentioned, and it would just be like, “Oh, that was just a bad person!”.”

However, when produced with care, taking the time to flesh out the characters and creating the conditions that would allow the public to empathize, and connect with them, these stories could add great value to the sphere of media representation. Some good examples of these model would be, the previously mentioned *Pose* (2018), *Banana Fish* (2018), *The Handmaid* (2016), or *Orange is the New Black* (2013). Actually, these stories can have a rather cathartic effect on LGBTQIA+ people. In fact, it is important to remember that, despite the fact that rights have been granted, and that they appear to be fully inserted within society, there is still a very much a sort of subversive, outsider nature to the queer community.

“From a queer perspective, you’re always made out to be an outsider, and seeing yourself being represented as an outsider, as some kind of anti-establishment character, some type of villain or anti-mainstream person, I think can be cathartic as well, when you’re watching from a queer standpoint. That’s because it leans into this notion of being an outsider, being an outcast, not being normal, not being accepted, and I think it’s what quite a lot of us feel regularly, especially when interacting with non-queer people.” (Interviewee #6)

Clearly, the subject of representation is a nuanced one, and the answer for what constitutes good representation, especially when dealing with such sensitive subjects as marginalized minorities and crime, is a rather tricky one to find. Nevertheless, it is a subject worth exploring and the answers obtained in this study, are able to paint a picture of what the queer community wants to see, and how they perceive and relate to, different types of media depictions of their identity groups.

## Conclusion

The initial aim of this thesis was to analyze queer images in entertainment media through the eyes of the LGBTQIA+ community. More specifically, to look into the ways they perceive and relate to the queer centric, or queer featuring content that has been produced and released. Not only that but, this research was also conducted with a more specific type of queer entertainment media representation in mind, a research area nearly untapped, that of LGBTQIA+ people entanglement with crime. A type of depiction which was once again, was analyzed through the standpoint of community members.

Firstly, through conducting a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews (Byrne, 2012), with a diverse group of self-identifying queer people, it became possible to extract firsthand data, based on the personal, lived experiences of the minority group in question. This was a particularly important point for a research focusing on the quality, accuracy, and repercussions of media depicting an ostracized community, since they are able to provide a completely different and “from-within” perspective on the subjects (Harding, 1992).

As such, through the collecting of this data, it was possible to assess not only the ways in which queer media has failed to accurately, and tastefully represent the LGBTQIA+ community, but also, how they wish to be portrayed, the stories they wish to see, and the type of characters they wish to have represent them. Likewise, through this research, it also became possible to understand what this minority group’s standpoint is, in regard to the intersection between crime and queerness. Not only when it came to its portrayals in TV and film, but also how it expresses within the community.

Furthermore, several new data points were observed and collected during the interviewing process, notably regarding the effects of media visibility and representation. This was measured both in regard to queer individuals’ identity and community construction, as well as, in wider, heteronormative audiences and society’s outlook and attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community. In the same manner, the question of intersectionality took center stage in the discussions around the scope of representation, but also criminality and criminalization. Also, it became clear what they believed to be

the root problems, and consequently the possible solutions, behind both improper portrayals of queerness on-screen, as well as the marginalization of the community.

Finally, it became possible to, through the data collected, deduct answers to the research questions this essay proposed itself to answer, and also raise more questions, open ideas, and allow new discussions to take place.

***Do queer people living in Europe identify with the characters and stories portrayed in entertainment media, and if so, how?***

This thesis uncovered that, queer people are not equally represented in media, that diversity of background, identity and experience was in fact lacking severely in the content featuring LGBTQIA+ characters. The question of representation went further than just having any type of queer character on-screen for the participants, or in this case, one model of queer character serve as a representative for the entire LGBTQIA+ community and experience. The question of equating the representation of this community with exclusively white, homosexual identities results in a rather limiting conception and image of a community as diverse as this one, and the erasure of a multitude of experiences and ways of life (Kohen, 2016).

This study's participants, yearned for content which featured the diversity, and intersectionality of identities existent amongst queer people (Crenshaw, 1989). By focusing on presenting characters which possessed multiple intersectional marginalized identities, they felt media would be able to represent the queer community in a more faithful and inclusive way. In fact, several participants claimed to not feel like the majority of the queer media they had engaged with, had been made for them. This was either due to the fact that, their own identities were not portrayed, or portrayed through the use of stereotypes, or because the material had been produced by non-queer creatives for straight audiences. Thus, they felt forced to "make do" with what they had been given - white, gay, male characters and stereotypical archetypes.

In the first case, interviewees talked about how, due to the lack of media which portrayed their own identities, either in regard to their sexual orientation, gender identity or the particular intersection they existed in, they had looked for assurance, connection,



and community in content that did not feature “themselves”. To begin with, the lack of diversity was pointed out as an obstacle in the process of identification with the queer media that has been released. An obstacle that excluded the majority of the interviewees, who belonged to marginalized groups within the LGBTQIA+ community. In the same way, the type of stories and character arcs afforded to the queer group were described as, more often than not, repetitive and inaccurate stereotypes (Campbell and Carilli, 2013).

Consequently, this phenomenon of bad representation is attributed to the lack of the queer perspective behind the scenes. Participants all stood in agreement that, the great majority of queer media that has been produced thus far, has been created with both a straight audience in mind, as well as with a group of straight creatives behind it. This “outside” perspective explains the productions dependence on cartoonish stereotypes, tragic or repetitive tropes, and recycling of heterosexual and binary stories and experiences (Campbell and Carilli, 2013). Although in theory, this series and films are portraying LGBTQIA+ characters, and the LGBTQIA+ experience, the reality is that they are lacking the queer nuance, the thing that makes queer stories unique (Doty, 2002). In turn, this makes the content appealing to straight audiences but is unable to connect with LGBTQIA+ ones.

Despite recognizing that, a lot of improvement has been achieved in the last few years, which has granted them pieces of media with which they have been able to connect and identify with, there is still, in participants opinions, a lot of work to be done in order for them, and the whole rest of the community, to feel represented in media. The understanding of identity through community, through seeing images of the group you identify with, was referred to as a key point in the interviewees process of identity construction (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This need for images of oneself; for reassurance in regard to the validity of their feelings and experience; for the search of likeminded people, was pointed as the main reason for the interviewees pursuit of queer centric and featuring media. In fact, they talked about the importance of validating your identity (Hall, 1996), and how media visibility can play a big role in normalizing it, specifically in the case of marginalized minorities. Once again, as mentioned by one of the interviewees, being seen is being accepted and media has the power to give voice to the marginalized (Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald, 2000).

### *What type of queer representation is favored within the LGBTQIA+ community?*

When approaching the theme of ideal representation on-screen, the main terms mentioned by interviewees were *normal*, *quiet*, *natural*, and *inclusive*. This showcased a clear yearning for non-sensationalized stories of queer suffering and pain, for stories where queer people were allowed to live happy and content lives, without the ever looming fear of death, ostracization or “being exposed” over their heads.

The prevalence of tragic tropes within LGBTQIA+ narratives, was consistently pointed out as one of the main problems with queer media representation by participants. They felt like these stories perpetuated notions of queerness as “other”, and that suffering and death were natural byproducts of the ostracization experienced by the community. On the one hand, there is the *Bury Your Gays* trope (Hulan, 2017), which by showcasing death in direct association with being queer, promotes the notion that queerness is worthy of punishment. This was pointed as being a particularly dangerous association and idea to promote in a community that is at higher risk of suicide such as is the case with the LGBTQIA+ group (Haas et al., 2010).

On the other hand, there is the *coming out* arc, or the heteronormative, binary love story. Whilst one presents the epitome of what heteronormative society believes the queer experience to be, the other is a reflection of the lack of queer perspectives and input during the creative process. Although coming out represents, in a lot of queer people’s lives, a formative turning point, sometimes good, sometimes traumatic, to repeatedly explore the same exact narrative over, and over again, removes space from other, more interesting, new and comfortable stories about the queer experience to be explored and made visible.

As for the perpetuating of the use of heteronormative standards in LGBTQIA+ stories, participants felt they mostly missed the mark when it came to connecting with queer audiences. The study participants mentioned how they longed for stories which truly explored the queer experience, queer love, and queer sensitivities. They wished to see stories that were able to capture the intricate, and delicate nuances of what it means to live outside of heteronormative, binary society, how different it feels like to love someone of the same gender, or express yourself in a fluid manner (Doty, 2002; Campbell and Carilli, 2013).

Moreover, an obvious desire for the introduction of complex, gray characters, who possess multiple intersectional identities could be understood from the interviewees answers. They claimed to be tired of seeing the same type of flat, background character being used to represent them. Participants talked about how, the same way they are complex human beings, with personality, who make mistakes and who grow, with more to them than just their sexuality, they wished to see characters on-screen who represented that. By introducing complex figures into their narratives, who just happen to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, producers and creatives, would be able to better connect with queer audiences and, consequently make them feel truly seen and represented (Gurthie, et al. 2013).

Finally, the biggest, most important point referred to by participants in regard to what good representation entailed was, in their opinion, the portrayal of LGBTQIA+ people as normal people. Not as a quirky “other”, not as someone whose personality defining trait is them being loud and queer, but as someone with the same yearnings and desires as everyone else. A craving for content in which a queerness can exist in the background of characters living content lives, that is not treated as the main plot point, but simply as a nice extra that allows queer people to see themselves in the story, and at the same time, live through them.

***How do queer people living in Europe perceive the association of queerness and criminality often portrayed in entertainment media?***

Throughout the research, it was possible to denote how, despite all the progress achieved by LGBTQIA+ activists in the past decades, there is still a sort of subversive nature that permeates and defines the queer experience. Although queerness is no longer criminalized and punishable by law, and although at first glance, queer people are now inserted within wider society, the reality is that, for many within the community access and opportunities are not as readily and easily available (Frederick, 2014). So, it becomes impossible to dissociate this subversive outsider character from the LGBTQIA+, both in media and in real life (Dennis, 2014).

Consequently, the connection with crime remains, mainly due to the previously mentioned disparity of opportunities, which can lead to an engagement with illegal work for survival (Peterson and Panfil, 2014). This reality is then largely explored in media, with stories about members of the LGBTQIA+ group becoming entangled with crime. Also, the exploration of the historic criminalization of queer people in media, was mentioned by interviewees as another way producers associated the two concepts. These movies or shows regarding the history and struggles of the community, due to the criminalization of their love, were pointed as important records of a past that should not be forgotten.

Nevertheless, the connection between queer identities and crime was considered by participants to be a slippery slope, at times necessary, at times dangerous. Firstly, the way that crime is often pushed on individuals due to their marginal identities, how a lack of opportunities can result in people engaging in illegal work as a form of survival, was pointed out by interviewees as being an important phenomenon to be explored within media. On this matter, questions of intersectionality came to the forefront, with interviewees acknowledging how a variety of different marginalized identities exist within the community. Then, how they in turn influence, not only each person's experience, but also their privileges, and consequently their relation to crime (Peterson and Panfil, 2014).

Their acknowledged relatively privileged upbringing made it so, interviewees felt this was not their personal experience, however, this did not deter them from being able to empathize with the "queer criminal" stories. In fact, participants talked about how important it was to tell these stories, how representing the full scope of the queer experience, and how making visible the diversity within the community and the struggles that come with it, was an essential part in achieving good representation (Kohen, 2016). As mentioned before, being seen is being accepted, and once again, media has a lot of power in regard to shaping the public's perception of different groups. So, to make the invisible groups of the community and their experiences visible, is to make them feel accepted and validated. In the same way that, to make the audience empathize with them and their struggles, may bring about change.

This, however, can be a double-edged sword. The second perspective, lays on the idea that, the portrayal of queer as criminal in media can reflect negatively on the community,

specifically on the ways the public views queer people. Whilst they recognize that this connection is a reality that takes place within the LGBTQIA+ community - as it does within every other group -, their status as a marginalized minority which had to fight for so many years in order to be accepted and be granted rights, and the prejudice that it still faces to this day, make queer people apprehensive about having this notion of themselves be broadcast. Media's influence in shaping the public's perception made participants feel like this type of narrative ought to be handled with the upmost care, with especial attention to nuance and contextualization. This is because they feared that by creating an association between their community, and the engagement with illegal behavior, this could damage the image of the LGBTQIA+ group. At the same time, it could also give "justification" for homophobic hate, and undo all the hard-earned progress achieved by queer activists thus far (Woods, 2014).

This apprehension was also justified due to how often queer narratives are appropriated by people outside the community, and presented without any sort of nuance and care, in turn, aggravating negative perceptions of queer people. As such, this sort of portrayal tends to fall into stereotypes, and caricatured representations of LGBTQIA+ people which lack the depth necessary for audiences, both queer and not, to be able to empathize with them (Russo, 1981). Therefore, without empathy there is no understanding, and without understanding audiences are left to take these narratives at face value and consequently, assume "queer equals criminal".

Despite this, interviewees defended that with the right producers and creatives, these stories should be able to be told and thrive, as they are a reality that exists within the community so, they should not be made invisible in favor of straight audiences' sensibilities. Ignoring these stories would be to ignore LGBTQIA+ peoples experiences, their agency and complexity (Panfil, 2013). Therefore, as long as it is approached with dutiful nuance and queer sensibility, these narratives and the association of queerness and crime can, and should be explored on-screen.

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# Appendix

# Appendix 1: Recruitment Messages Used During Sampling

## English Version:

Hey!! I'm working on my thesis right now, it's on "Be Gay, Do Crime: Representation of Queerness in Association with Crime in Entertainment Media" (the title is still a work in progress), and I'm currently recruiting queer people in order to conduct interviews, and I was wondering if you'd be available to do an interview about it?! It's obviously anonymous so you can say whatever you want comfortably. The research focuses on not just queer representation in (audiovisual) media, and crime, but on intersectionality and the "necessity" of gay crime as marginalized minorities etc. Let me know if you want to do it and when it would be a good time for it (I'm very flexible with days and time so just let me know when you're available, and I'll work around you).

Also, if you want, I can give you a little list of media content I compiled with some of the content I'm using as reference, just so you can get an idea of what I'm working with, but you're more than welcome to bring in your own references/content, it's always appreciated!! You can either DM me at @jessica\_sagres or email me at [jessica.l.sagres@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.l.sagres@gmail.com) .

## Portuguese Version:

Hey!! Eu estou a trabalhar na minha tese e estava à procura de pessoas para entrevistar e queria saber se estarias disponível?? Eu estou à procura de pessoas queer para este projeto que se foca na representação da comunidade LGBTQ+ em média de entretenimento (audiovisual) em associação com criminalidade (o título é "Be gay, do crime: Representation of queerness in association with crime in entertainment media", sendo que ainda é um work in progress). Eu estou a focar-me, não só em aspetos relacionados com a comunidade LGBTQ+, identidade e representação na média, mas também interseccionalidade e a "necessity of gay crime" como minorias marginalizadas. A entrevista seria completamente anónima e os teus dados/informação não iriam ser partilhados com ninguém.

Eu gostaria imenso de te ter como um dos entrevistados e a tua ajuda seria muitíssimo apreciada. Diz-me se isto seria algo em que estarias interessado, e quando estarias disponível para podermos marcar (eu sou bastante flexível com dias e horas). Se quiseres, posso enviar-te uma listazinha com séries/filmes que eu pretendo usar como referência, só para teres uma ideia, mas qualquer sugestão de conteúdo que se encaixe é sempre bem-vinda!!

Outra coisa, a entrevista pode ser feita em português ou inglês, mas podes dizer-me isso no dia, e se conheceres alguém que encaixe a descrição que possa estar interessado eu agradeço.

**Note:** This message was mainly sent through the social media app Instagram, and was constructed in a more casual tone due to the audience it was trying to recruit

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

This research, being conducted for the researcher's master's thesis in Media and Communication, at Lund University, will focus on the intersection between queerness and criminality within audiovisual entertainment media. I would like to ask you about your engagement, and outlook in regard to the previously mentioned media, as a self-identifying queer person. The interview will take approximately 1 hour, and it will be conducted through Zoom.

The researcher asks for your consent to record the interview and to use interview findings in the master's thesis project. You are welcome to say as much or as little as you want, you may also choose to not answer any of the questions or to stop the interview at any time.

Please give your verbal/written consent.

Recording and anonymity: if you permit, the interview will be recorded, the tapes and the notes from the interviews will be handled confidentially and will not be shared with any other party, when all analysis of the interview data are completed, the files will be deleted, and notes will be anonymized. The researcher's work will summarize input from the interviews, as well as from other data sources (background documents, secondary sources).

References or quotes from the interviews will not include information that will identify individual participants.

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Participant's signature

### Appendix 3: Interviewee Information Chart

<b>NAME</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>SEXUALITY</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>NATIONALITY</b>
<b>INT1</b>	23	Female	Bisexual	White Caucasian	Portuguese
<b>INT2</b>	26	Male	Bisexual	Caucasian/ Latino	Portuguese
<b>INT3</b>	22	Male	Gay	Black	Brazilian
<b>INT4</b>	21	Female	Lesbian	White Caucasian	Irish
<b>INT5</b>	27	Female	Bisexual	East Asian	Chinese
<b>INT6</b>	23	Non-binary/ female presenting	Bisexual	White Caucasian	German
<b>INT7</b>	26	Female	Bisexual	White Caucasian	German
<b>INT8</b>	25	Male	Gay	Latino	Portuguese
<b>INT9</b>	26	Female	Bisexual	White Caucasian	Italian
<b>INT10</b>	26	Female	Bisexual	White Caucasian	German



## Appendix 4: Interviews Schedule and Information

<b>INTERVIEWEE</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>METHOD</b>	<b>DURATION</b>	<b>LANGUAGE</b>
<b>INT1 (PILOT)</b>	15/02/2024	15:00 CET	Zoom	1h11minutes	English
<b>INT2</b>	26/02/2024	16:00 CET	Zoom	1h12minutes	English
<b>INT3</b>	26/02/2024	17:40 CET	Zoom	1h11minutes	Portuguese
<b>INT4</b>	07/03/2024	18:30 CET	Zoom	43 minutes	English
<b>INT5</b>	08/03/2024	10:00 CET	Zoom	2h10minutes	English
<b>INT6</b>	08/03/2024	13:00 CET	Zoom	54 minutes	English
<b>INT7</b>	15/03/2024	14:00 CET	Zoom	1h02minutes	English
<b>INT8</b>	25/03/2024	18:30 CET	Zoom	1h06minutes	Portuguese
<b>INT9</b>	11/04/2024	16:00 CET	In Person	1h23minutes	English
<b>INT10</b>	13/04/2024	10:15 CET	Zoom	54 minutes	English

## Appendix 5: Interview Guide – Pilot

- Would you say you are a consumer of queer media?
  - What are some shows or movies in that genre that you would say you are a fan of?
- What attracts you to this type of media (focused/featuring queerness)?
- What do you think sets queer media apart from other genres?
- Would you consider that, being able to identify and relate to a narrative or the character on screen is an important factor in how much you are able to enjoy or connect with a piece of media? Why?
- What type of narratives or characters do you find yourself more frequently drawn to?
- When talking about queer centric/featuring entertainment media, what type of stories and characters do you enjoy engaging with the most? Why?
  - Are these a good representation of the LGBTQAI+ community and experience, in your opinion? (of your experience as a queer individual)
- What are some aspects of the LGBTQAI+ group that are, in your opinion, overlooked, unexplored, or even misrepresented in entertainment media?
- Do you feel that queer centric content is being produced with the queer community in mind/ for the queer community? Why?
- How do you feel your personal experience as a queer person differs from the ones featured in the media?
- Do you believe there is still a subversive and outsider nature to the queer community? Why and how does it (not) manifest?
- Do you think the association of “crime” and “queerness” is justified? Can you expand on that? (briefly explain what I mean by crime)
- Do you believe that idea (the interviewee’s previous answer) is the same for the majority of LGBTQAI+ community members? Why?
- Have you consumed or engaged with any piece of media where queerness and criminality were featured in association with one another?
  - If so, which ones? Can you talk a little bit about them?

- How would you describe these pieces of media? (give freedom for them to talk about any aspect of the content they might find relevant or have connected to)
- Did you identify with, or relate to any aspect of these stories or characters, perhaps on a more personal level? Why? (doesn't have to be directly related to the crime aspect in a literal sense, mention that)
- In your opinion, why is this type of media (portraying LGBT+ people engaging in illegal activities) still being produced and released?
- As a member of the LGBTQAI+ community, and not as an individual, do you believe the type of queer representation (quality, scope, plot, characters, etc.) that has been promoted and has reached a wider, mainstream audience, is a good representation of the community itself (on a broader level)? Why?
- Are you familiarized with the concept of intersectionality? (if not explain briefly)
- What role do you think this concept might play, in regard to queer representation on screen?
- What type of narratives, characters and ideas relating to queerness, would you like to see explored more on screen? Why?
- Do you think media representation has a real and tangible effect on marginalized communities and individuals? Why, and how so?
- Would the portrayal of the intersection of queerness and criminality on screen be, in your opinion, of value to the LGBTQAI+ community? Why, and how so?
- What would you say your stance/point of view is, in relation to the idea of the "necessity of gay crime" (how queer people often are pushed by pure necessity, to go against the law), and the context surrounding it?
- Do you think there should be space in the media for the exploration of such ideas (the "necessity of gay crime")?
- Would you like to share anything else, any thoughts or ideas that might have come up during the interview and that you believe could be interesting to explore?

## Appendix 6: Interview Guide – Final

- Would you say you are a consumer of queer media?
  - What are some shows or movies in that genre that you would say you are a fan of?
- What attracts you to this type of media (focused/featuring queerness)?
- What do you think sets queer media apart from other genres?
- Would you consider that, being able to identify and relate to a narrative or the characters on screen is an important factor in how much you are able to enjoy or connect with a piece of media? Why?
- When talking about queer centric/featuring entertainment media, what type of stories and characters do you enjoy engaging with the most? Why?
  - Are these a good representation of the LGBTQAI+ community and experience, in your opinion? (of your experience as a queer individual)
- What are some aspects of the LGBTQAI+ group that are, in your opinion, overlooked, unexplored, or even misrepresented in entertainment media?
- Do you feel that queer centric content is being produced with the queer community in mind/ for the queer community? Why?
- How do you feel your personal experience as a queer person differs from the ones featured in the media?
- Do you believe there is still a subversive and outsider nature to the queer community? Why and how does it (not) manifest?
- Do you think the association of “crime” and “queerness” is justified? Can you expand on that? (briefly explain what I mean by crime)
- Do you believe that idea (the interviewee’s previous answer) is the same for the majority of LGBTQAI+ community members? Why?

- Have you consumed or engaged with any piece of media where queerness and criminality were featured in association with one another?
  - If so, which ones? Can you talk a little bit about them?
  - How would you describe these pieces of media? (give freedom for them to talk about any aspect of the content they might find relevant or have connected to)
- Did you identify with, or relate to any aspect of these stories or characters, perhaps on a more personal level? Why? (doesn't have to be directly related to the crime aspect in a literal sense, mention that)
- In your opinion, why is this type of media (portraying LGBTQAI+ people engaging in illegal activities) still being produced and released?
- As a member of the LGBTQAI+ community, and not as an individual, do you believe the type of queer representation (quality, scope, plot, characters, etc.) that has been promoted and has reached a wider, mainstream audience, is a good representation of the community itself (on a broader level)? Why?
- Are you familiarized with the concept of intersectionality? (if not explain briefly)
- What role do you think this concept might play, in regards to queer representation on screen?
- What type of narratives, characters and ideas relating to queerness, would you like to see explored more on screen? Why?
- Do you think media representation has a real and tangible effect on marginalized communities and individuals? Why, and how so?
- Would the portrayal of the intersection of queerness and criminality on screen be, in your opinion, of value to the LGBTQAI+ community? Why, and how so?
- What would you say your stance/point of view is, in relation to the idea of the necessity of gay crime (how queer people often are pushed by pure necessity, to go against the law), and the context surrounding it?
- Do you think there should be space in the media for the exploration of such ideas (the necessity of gay crime)?
- Would you like to share anything else, any thoughts or ideas that might have come up during the interview and that you believe could be interesting to explore?

## Appendix 7: Interviewee #1 Interview Transcription and Coding

**J:** Would you say you are a consumer of queer media?

**INT 1:** Absolutely, yes! I am currently reading a gay book so... it's a collection and I got one for valentine's day so that explains a lot about my consumption of queer media.

**J:** What are some shows or movies in that genre that you would say you are a fan of?

**INT 1:** I think I end up going more for the Eastern side, so Southeast Asian. Things like Thailand, like KinnPorsche; things like the Untamed, or (Chinese name of the show?), or whatever you wanna call it, which is Chinese; Semantic Error which is Korean. So I end up going for that Asian kind of portrayal, which might be a little different from the Western one, because the West has become used to sex all of the time, and the drugs all of the time while you are a teen kind of thing, while you are in high school, and I prefer just having that adults kind of, Asian portrayal of queerness rather than the Western vibe. But I also enjoy, just to mention a very different kind of content, I also enjoy The Haunting of Bly Manor, which has a queer couple unexpectedly, and it's a very good representation of a queer couple, and a very different way of representing a queer couple. So, it's not about them being teens, and it's not about them figuring out their sexual orientation, it's about two grown women, who are in two very different situations, and they're lesbians, which is not very common in the queer representation.

**J:** What attracts you to this type of media (focused/featuring queerness)?

**INT 1:** For one, queer relationships develop in a way a straight relationship wouldn't, because a straight relationship is expected, society expects it and even assumes that, if you're a man and a woman together, you're a couple. So, they even present themselves in a way that is very easy for them to move around in society as a straight couple. If you're a queer person, you don't move around in the society like that, even if you're in a society that is accepting of queerness, you have to move in a different way, present yourself in a different way, you have to talk a little bit different, so the experience in society for a queer person vs. for a straight person is very different. So, watching a romantic film where the main characters are straight is very different than watching a film where the main characters are queer, everything changes. There's a whole level of bullying, there's a whole level of how they move in society, and perhaps in some sort of niche clubs, it's a very different way the way they interact with people, with colleagues and perhaps even in work. So straight, I've seen straight, we've all seen straight, 99% of the things out there are straight, and I've seen enough of it, I wanna see something that represents me specially, because so many things are straight. And, if you watch a straight movie, 90% of the couples there will be straight, you get like one gay person, perhaps two queer people, just to throw it in there, and if you watch queer stuff you still get straight people in there so like, we gotta add some spice to it cause, it gets really boring to watch straight people go through things that I don't go through. So, it's about representation and also about how we've had enough of the straights already, there's already enough straight stories out there, we don't need any more you know.

**J:** Would you consider that, being able to identify and relate to a narrative or the character on screen is an important factor in how much you are able to enjoy or connect with a piece of media? Why?

**INT 1:** Absolutely! I think we wanna see ourselves being represented and we wanna have some sort of empathy for the character. I remember there was this one film, I don't know what it was, but it was on tv, and I watched it, but it was like, Jennifer Lopez wanted to get pregnant with this guy, and it's the straightest story ever, it's like really straight, and there is nothing wrong with it you know. It's just this woman, and she wants to have this baby, for some reason that I don't understand, and she ends up finding this guy, and they end up having this baby sort of together, whatever, and they get married and bla, bla, bla, they sort of have a baby together, or twins or something, I don't know. It's like, ok, it's a nice story but like, point number one, I don't wanna have a kid so the main plot, the main force of the film was not at all interesting to me, didn't understand it, i just stared at the movie half of the time like, I don't really care about this. And then, her relationship with him is very much a "woman and a man" and they're very much what you'd expect a woman and a man to be, and it's beautiful, but I don't really care for it cause I'm not that person. I am bisexual, and one thing that is important to notice is that, even as a bisexual person, even if I were to be dating a man, my relationship with that man would be different, than if I were straight. So, it's very different to have a story were you have a man and a woman who are in love - it could've been the exact

same plot -, a man and a woman are in love and they wanna have children together... the fact that both of them are straight is very, very different than if one of them would be queer or bisexual because, you would interact with a man differently if you're bisexual for example. So, the story itself was incredibly boring to me, didn't really peak any interest, i wasn't really interested in any of the characters, I didn't understand their struggles, I didn't really care for their successes either, it was just boring all throughout because, if I were in that position I wouldn't give two shits about anything, it was just absolutely boring to me but whatever. If you were to take the exact same story and you were to, for example, make the character of Jennifer Lopez, just for example bisexual, or have the male character of the story be, perhaps transexual, perhaps non-binary, that would've been enough of a change, even if it was just this small detail, it would've been enough of a change to bring some more complexity into it. For example, maybe having kids biologically isn't that easy in that case; or somehow, if they want to adopt, they would've had a different challenge because, all of a sudden, you're queer and people don't like it when you adopt kids when you're queer and all of that. So, that would've been an entirely different layer. that would've, one, made the film more interesting and complex; number two, it would've made the characters actually more interesting to me, because there was something else happening in their life rather than the "I love you, but I can't love you" kind of thing, you know? If you can't relate, even to some small aspects, you can't have some sort of empathy to the fights those characters are going through, I find it very, very boring, that kind of thing.

**J:** What type of narratives or characters do you find yourself more frequently drawn to? It can be genres, archetypes, character archetypes, what kind of genres do you usually go for?

**INT 1:** I'm not really sure I actually think a lot about this. I try to find, I really, really try hard to find really bisexual women, or if they're lesbian they are feminine, because that's more of who I am, so like, I am a feminine queer person, so I try to find representation in there, someone that is kind of like me in a way. But also, I end up going to a lot, one of two things: one genre where it's like, they are queer, whatever kind of queer they are, and is the world around them that is very violent, for example, because they are in crime, because they are in gangs, because it's a war or whatever, so something like that, the environment around them is very chaotic and very violent, and they happen to be queer, so the story itself isn't about them being gay and struggling with being gay, it's about some other conflict that is happening in the background, something bigger than them. Or number two, when it's just soft and cozy, and they're out here just falling in love, and it's simple and easy, kind of comfortable, you know? So, things where they aren't struggling with their sexual identity because, I've been there, I've done that, I don't wanna see it on television because like, it's not for me, I went through it. When they have shows where they have one character who is like homophobic to begin with, and then it's the development of them being like, finding out their sexual identity, and struggling to accept it, and there's this whole idea of like "Oh, they were homophobic but then like they fell in love, and they were struggling a bit but then they get together", that kind of thing for example, is an immediate no for me because, you get that feeling of like: number one, I've dealt with homophobic people, I'm tired, I don't wanna deal with them any longer. Like, if you're going to represent that in whatever kind of media, please, I'm not into it, you have to be very careful, we've all been there and it's too traumatizing sometimes. Also, this idea of like, your sexual identity has to be a struggle, you have to struggle, you have to almost like, not want it at first because it's like, a bad thing almost, it's like having to accept a disease or something. It's sort of a narrative I don't like, so I usually avoid those kinds of media, or I find them really uninteresting right at the beginning, and that is something that you see a lot in Western shows, I think. You see a lot of that struggle to accept their sexual identity, or really being loud about it, and almost going through a rebellious phase against everyone, because they want them to just accept their sexual identity so much. It's almost this big gray thing where their main personality trait is them being queer, that is really just annoying to me, that is just one part of me, it doesn't have to be everything that I am. That is why *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is such a good example because, you weren't expecting it, it was nothing that was very grand in the plot, it was not just about them being gay, it was about them being people, you know what I mean? So, I usually end up going for those genres where it's usually, either just comfortable, and they're just falling in love, and we don't mention homophobia, and everything is just nice and ideal; or it's this thing where there is just something so much greater than them, and it completely surpasses the fact that they are queer. So, everything that has to do with representing queer people has just, you know, people is what I like.

**J:** Are these a good representation of the LGBTQAI+ community and experience, in your opinion? (based on your personal experience as a queer individual)

**INT 1:** They are not the most realistic, I think, but I think I like them because they are not the most realistic. Sometimes they can be, and it would be great if it was always the case, but I think that they are definitely

on the ideal side, what we want the world to be like instead of what the world is actually like, but I think that's why they work so well as an escape or something, they're just a "get away" ideal. To be honest with you, I think they are just as good of a representation as the straight stories are, you know what I mean? When you watch Titanic, that's not realistic at all, but it's like, one ideal, so it fills in this purpose of being a good representation in terms of what media can do as a representation, whilst maintaining the profit, and the numbers, and the Hollywood thing. It does as much of a good job as any other straight movie or series would do, but is it realistic? Not exactly, but it's also not the point of it being realistic. I have yet to find a good, realistic, queer piece of media, like something that was actually realistic, I haven't found one yet. I'm not sure if that's something I would also be very interested in, because it would have to be like, really, really good in order to make me actually interested in watching it, and how another queer person goes like, through a lot of struggles as well. But I also think that it's a little bit different because, when you watch like, for example, I am thinking of Semantic Error right now. Semantic Error is very focused on their relationship, and them falling in love, so you don't actually see them going through their everyday life, you don't see them a lot... you see them a lot with friends, sometimes, but you don't see them like, attend classes or working, because if you were to see every single thing in their lives it would actually be pretty normal because, they just live their ordinary lives, they just do ordinary stuff, and they aren't actually like... in this case, they aren't actually like "OMG, I'm gay!", and there are rainbows everywhere, or they aren't out here being hardcore victims of bullying or something. So, they aren't like, exaggerated in the way they manifest their queerness. You end up seeing a lot of their queer moments because you see them together most of the time so, it's not realistic in that sense because you always see them together falling in love, and the story is very much about them falling in love. But, if you were to like, see them live their regular day-to-day lives, as characters in the world that was built, it would've been realistic. They are sort of very quiet about their relationship in general, they're not out there, like some couples are, with matching Facebook pages or whatever, they're not doing that or whatever... for queer people it makes sense to keep your love life a little on the quiet side, or a little ambiguous, like, you're with this person a lot, it's a very important person to you, but you don't actually like, you don't do them like, a special Instagram story. I just saw a girl friend of mine doing that, she was just doing that like "OMG, you're my Valentine!", saying the time she's been with her boyfriend, that's not the type of thing queer people would do, they have a more quiet love life, and in Semantic Error, you have that so, if you were to have presented it a little different, it would've been realistic, it would've been like, this quiet, falling in love, but not being loud about it kind of thing. If that makes any sense!

**J:** Do you feel that queer centric content is being produced with the queer community in mind/ for the queer community? Why?

**INT 1:** No, absolutely not! Absolutely not! No, that is a resounding easy answer for me at least. It also depends on what kind of media you're referring to off course, and what you are focusing on. Fanfiction, queer fanfiction, especially for the straights, it's written by straights for the straights, period. A lot of the stories that focus on teenagerhood that are queer, like Heartstopper for example,...I would go as far as to say even Call me By Your Name, I love that movie, it was meant for the straights. Every single...I'm thinking also of some Japanese media, some Japanese anime and manga, are also very much made by straight people, or made for straight people, because they often end up falling in these stereotypes of like,...not always off course, but the tendency is that you have two gay men - which is the most common representation -, you have two gay men, and one of them is very classic masculine, you know macho man, and the other one is incredibly feminine, and honestly, if you were to add a pair of boobs, it would've been a woman, you know? And it's a straight story, except they have two penises, and that's it, so it ends up being a little flat. Some stories are good, but you end up feeling like,...specially with this tendency of the BL rising as a genre itself, definitely made by straight women, for straight women, and it's very hard for them, for example, to let go of this idea of a more masculine person and of a more feminine person, for them to understand that it is two men, you know? And it's a relationship between two men, and that's what makes it gay. When it comes to representation of women, of queer women, it's even worse, it's way, way worse in my opinion because, you don't usually get stories of two women falling in love, instead, the great majority of wlw sort of media is porn made for straight men. Cause when you tell a love story that happens to have sex in it, another thing is just straight-out lesbianism created by straight men, for straight men that then, go on to think and fetishize the relationship. I think definitely meant for the straight people, it's what we have, so we gotta make do with what we got. Also, there's this thing of like, I am not sure if a gay person wrote the story about if it would ever hit the mainstream, because a lot of people would probably think this was just, you know, a story and not a gay story, because it would've just been a story about people that happen to be gay. So, perhaps it wouldn't be perceived, or it would fill in this idea of "We're not marketing it as queer because how can we market it as queer if they don't say queer twenty times a page?"



so something like that, definitely for the straights, and we don't have much else to go off of. It's been getting better, but you know.

**J:** How do you feel your personal experience as a queer person differs from the ones featured in the media?

**INT 1:** The representation in media versus my own personal experience? Depends a little bit. I think a lot of them know they're not... I've had... I think the most similar one that I've got would be Semantic Error, again because it's very quiet in the way that they happen to be queer, it doesn't talk about them being gay, there's like, no struggle of like "OMG, I'm gay, what do I do now?", you know? It was just very quiet, very simple, it was just two people falling in love. I think that had a lot to do with my own personal experience, which was very calm, very tranquil, very quiet in itself, so in that sense, there is some media out there that does match to my own personal experience, and does represent very well what my personal experience has been, you know? I didn't have to go through this struggle of having to figure out if my girlfriend was going to even like women or not, it was very simple, we just fell in love and that was it. But a lot of them out there can also,...it really depends on what you look for. I mean, I'm not involved in a gang so, the kind of relationships and experience I have are not the same, of what a queer couple would have while being in a gang you know? Or like, some ancient war that has been happening, so I guess that also comes from the fact that I also end up going for these sorts of like, violent contexts. Maybe if I were part of a gang, that would be my experience.

**J:** Do you believe there is still a subversive and outsider nature to the queer community? Why and how does it (not) manifest?

**INT 1:** As in "we're outsiders" kind of thing? Yeah, I do, I think it's kind of that thing of, we're tolerated, not respected, you know what I mean? It's just more of a...and I've lived a long time with like, this niche group of people, I know you can understand this, this niche group of people were like, queerness, and racism, and any kind of like, social sensitivities were actually being treated very easily, so it was very easy for us to talk about, it was very good understanding of these social issues, and after leaving that niche of people, all of a sudden you come back to the real world and you realize that, for a lot of people, you're their first gay friend, and this is really weird to me because, I know so many gay people, off course, so many queer people, and I frequent queer places. If I go to a bar, I go to a gay bar, and having to, all of a sudden see a person who is like "Oh, so you're queer? That is fine, ok you can come with your girlfriend.", and I'm over there just like "Why wouldn't I come with my girlfriend, like?", like you know, it's a little bit weird. So, I think that we're definitely outsiders in the sense that, like...I don't wanna say zoo creatures, I think that's, maybe a little too tough, but almost like an exotic pet, or something. That is an evil thing to say but, I guess that's sort of like, it's like a different world for them, it's a world they're not very familiar with, and when you do find another queer person, or when you find out a colleague of yours is queer, there is this change I think in the relationship between the two of you, especially if you're like, within the same mind, wavelength, you know? You do feel like there is a whole new different understanding to your relationship, and to who you are as two people because you find out that this person is also queer, that this person also has this experience, and there's this whole new vocabulary that all of a sudden you can use with that person, there is this whole new way of being that is ok with this person, and you allow yourself to talk in a certain way, to move in a certain way, and talk about certain things, and is fine to talk with this person about these things because this person is a safe place, this person is also queer. These are things that you can't do if you're talking to a straight person. Not that straight people are like...they're trying their best, but they don't really understand much of it, they're not in this world, and they definitely see themselves as being the normal, and we are the different ones. I definitely think that happens, like not to the point where it's bad or violent, but definitely to the point where they don't really understand, they try to tolerate and they give their best but, it's just not very good, that's all. Official quote!

**J:** Do you think the association of "crime" and "queerness" is justified? Can you expand on that? (briefly explained what I mean by crime)

**INT 1:** I think yeah, for one particular reason. When a person that is straight does a crime, nobody mentions they're straight, it's just a person committing a crime. If a person that is gay does a crime, everybody says that is a gay person that committed the crime, it's like always, it's a constant, because there's this thing of like "Oh, they're different, I have to mention it!", and this goes on to mention some other minority groups. If there's a guy that robs you on the metro, you are very likely to say, if it was a black guy, you're very likely to say "Oh, there was a black guy that robbed me!", immediately. If you saw a Muslim, I don't know, trying to steal something, you'd be more likely to say like "Oh I saw this Muslim person trying to steal

something!". You have like this sort of idea, we're ingrained with this sort of idea were, we take the characteristic that we can see from that person, or that we know that person has, and all of a sudden that is the identifying trait of that person, and if it was for example, just a white, seemingly straight person, that was kind of just Christian or something, it wouldn't be mentioned, and it would just be like, "Oh, that was just a bad person!". But no, if you're gay, and if you do a crime, you're a gay person doing a crime. It's always mentioned, and when you watch the news and you hear one night about a guy that stole something; and then another night about a guy that stole something; and then another night about a guy that killed somebody; and then another night about a gay person that stole something, you're going to remember that, on one of those nights a gay person committed a crime, but you're not gonna remember that on those other nights, three straight people committed crimes. So, it also has more to do with the fact that we always mention or feel the need to mention that is a gay person that did this, or any kind of minority. This minority person did this and we always mention that minority, we always have to mention it was a gay person who did this. So yes, that does make us outsiders because, there always is this need to mention something that for them (straight people) is different. Because it is the one thing I always notice and they always have to mention it or whatever, they always have to mention it with minorities. It also happens with black people a lot, or like foreigners. If it's a foreigner that's talking loud in the metro, everybody is gonna mention that it was a foreigner, it's not just a person talking loud, Portuguese people also talk loud like, why do you always have to mention that they're foreigners you know? Something like that. Instead of talking about the 5 trans people that did it, let's talk about the 95 straight people that did it, how about that?

**J:** Do you believe that idea (the interviewee's previous answer) is the same for the majority of LGBTQAI+ community members? Why?

**INT 1:** I think a lot of queer people would agree, but a lot of queer people also wouldn't, and I think it has a lot to do with how you deal with your own sexual identity. I fortunately was very calm and tranquil about it, it was chill for me, it was fine. But if you struggle with your sexual identity, especially in the sense that you don't wanna accept it at first, a lot of people end up becoming very homophobic for example, and so they end up having a straight like mind, or a straight like mindset, that was imposed on them by society or whatever, and they end up being a lot against like, gay people, within the community. Unfortunately, I've meet people like this, and I've had encounters like this. So, a lot of people would agree, a lot of people would be like "Yes, we are seen as outsiders! Yes, we are becoming our own little niche of safe places, because we have to!". Then there would be also the other group, the loud group where they're gay, but they have this very straight like mindset, and they even think of themselves as being a little different than others, or whatever. These are also the gay people that hate pride month, that hate the gay parades, and they are like "Why do you always have to always talk about like, rainbow? Why do you always have to have like, a rainbow phone case if you're gay?". Those people, they're fucking assholes, and they exist, and they exist within the LGBT community as well, and they would have a completely different perspective that what I am talking about here, they probably hate gay media or something, or probably they would like things that are very like, straight like over gay media, you know what I'm mentioning? Straight media is like, straight people doing it for the straights, and also the gays that are assholes, you know those. Unfortunately, they exist a lot. They wish they were straight and honestly, don't bother us with that. It's mostly white gay men, which says a lot, like the one thing were they're not privileged is the thing they complain about, how funny isn't it, very ironic.

**J:** Have you consumed or engaged with any piece of media where queerness and criminality were featured in association with one another?

**INT 1:** Absolutely, just the majority. Yeah, resounding yes, thank you, and I will keep on doing it.

**J:** Which ones? Can you talk a little bit about them?

**INT 1:** I liked a lot The Untamed, as it is known in English or (other names I couldn't catch), it has three names I don't know why. But I liked that a lot, and it's because when you talk about it...you take one person that loves The Untamed, and the first thing they'll talk about is the relationship between the two main characters, they're gay of course. It will be the relationship that they'll talk about, it's like this is the focal point, they present it as if it were a love story, because it's this obsession like, "OMG, their relationship is great!". Then, you go and actually watch the series, and you find out the series is barely about them at all. It's about war; and it's about like, different clans fighting; and it's about power and whatever, and you find out that just, all off a sudden, it's got a lot of layers to it, you know? It's also important to mention that is not violence, in the sense that they are victims of bullying, or they are the bullies, or there's just like,

someone beating someone else, or like these petty crimes, we're talking about specific, highly organized sets of violence. Gangs, for the KinnPorsche, and this kind of war, like clan war, that comes with The Untamed. We're talking about violence that is not justified but, it is explained within the means, within a context, so it's violence that has to stem from the context. If there's a fight for power, in a place where there's barely any laws, then guess what, people are going to fight with like swords or whatever. So, if they're a gang, they're gonna do evil stuff because they're a gang, it's the thing. So, I think when it comes to that violence, that organized violence, then it does come with more layer to the story, it does come with a very different interest, and also another layer of suspense, thriller, action, and they end up becoming actually very, very interesting. Think of like, how The Untamed is for gay people, what Jackie Chan is for the straights or something. You like the comparison? Sure, its violence, but you're on the good guy's side so whatever. It's more because of the action and the thriller, and it's more interesting that way rather than, you know...? I've never watched a horror, like an actual horror, or like scary things with like queer characters, that I'm thinking of as like, in the focal point. I think it's because, you know, if you're actually watching an actual horror film, you're just gonna die whether you're straight or queer, it doesn't matter so, it's just people whatever. But I've never watched like, any kind of...maybe you have, I haven't, Like any kind of horror, or scary stuff that's actually scary with queer people in it. Then comedy is just dangerous, dangerous territory, things can get way too bad there. We're going stereotypical, which is a direction that nobody likes so just stay off of that, we don't need queer comedies, we had High School Musical, that was fine we can settle for that.

**J:** I was going to ask how would you describe these pieces of media? However, you already went into that. Did you identify with, or relate to any aspect of these stories or characters, perhaps on a more personal level? Why?

**INT 1:** Personally connected with? I think those characters were very, very different from me in terms of personality, I guess. It wasn't like they were representing me as a person, disregarding the queer aspect, whether they were representing me as a person. Basically, I was saying that, personality wise or with the struggles, it's not something that I identify personally with because: one I'm not in a gang, and they have very different personalities from me, it's more like, empathy. It's much easier for me to be very empathetic and understanding of them and more interested in their stories in this case, because of this new layer of how they move around and how they interact.

**J:** In your opinion, why is this type of media (portraying LGBT+ people engaging in illegal activities) still being produced and released?

**INT 1:** Maybe because we're outsiders, again, we're seen as outsiders, and we're seen as like,...if you're not ...thinking of Not Me, they engage in violence because they are sort of activists, and it's this thing were, once you're a part of a minority, you understand, up to a certain point, what every other minority goes through, you have some more empathy for them. It's very easy for you to live your life if you have the privilege of, your own personal lifestyle, and your own personal way of living, is according to what society expects of you, then life is very easy for you. If you're an extroverted, social, straight, white person, middle class, you don't piss off anybody, you got a easier life, the easiest way to go about it. But, if you have just one that makes you sort of a minority, all off a sudden you go through more hardships in your life, and the more minorities you belong to the worse your life is, literally, we're a society so. We're always gonna be like this, whether you're an activist, or whether you're just angry at the world, being a minority definitely does enhance it. You're more likely to go...let's say for example, I'm a queer woman but I'm white, if there's a black parade, black power parade right there, I might be more likely to go to that parade, than a straight white woman, simply because I'm part of a minority, so I have a little more empathy, cause I understand a little more what they go through, rather than a straight person because a straight person is like, "Well, I don't understand, I have an easy life, life is easy!". Well, off course it is. So maybe, in that sense, it can be the reason why Not Me was very drawn into this activism that became sort of violent idea, but that also has a lot to do with being outsiders and that sort of thing. Also, with the thing of like, if it's a straight villain, you don't mention that the villain is straight, you just expect the villain to be straight, but if it's a gay villain, all of a sudden, it stays in your memory that its gay, because it's always mentioned that its gay, and it's their defining trait. Also, a little bit of confirmation bias sometimes, and that thing of propagating stereotypes and things like that, from people that don't really understand.

**J:** As a member of the LGBTQAI+ community, and not as an individual, do you believe the type of queer representation (quality, scope, plot, characters, etc.) that has been promoted and has reached a wider, mainstream audience, is a good representation of the community itself (on a broader level)? Why?

**INT 1:** Some of them have been very good, they have been you know, all right, they have their problems, but they are sort of alright, others not so much. It's bound to be like that, I don't think it's going to be...it can improve a little bit, but I don't think it's going to ever be like, close to perfect, because that's just the way media is. Media is always going to rely on some stereotypes, or it's always going to rely on fictional stuff that makes absolutely no sense sometimes. Sometimes, you know, sometimes it is good but it's kind of that thing. I am thinking of that thing were, things end up growing to the point where it's kind of bad, in the sense that, it might feed stereotypes. I am thinking of RuPaul's Drag Race, it was really cool at first, it was fun at first, it was actually very good for the community because all of a sudden there was like, this great boom of drag queens, and there's whole gay bars opening because of drag shows, and whatever. So, it was very good at first and maybe it was a necessary thing but like, it grew to the point where it also started getting a little bad too, you know what I mean, it was kind of like that. It's a sort of two-sided coin, or two faced coins, and I don't think it's ever going to improve very much, or be actually great representation out there. There was always going to be some very good representation, and then there's always going to be like, people that don't understand good representation; and there's going to be just very bad representation, and then sometimes, any kind of representation will be beneficial, or there will be some representation that just sort of focuses on some sort of community, or something, kind of like that. It's been improving a lot so we have to hold on to that, that it has been improving, and that it has been representing queerness in general as like, people, but it is still, you know. It's the same thing as like, reality tv: is it good, or is it bad? I mean, it's there, it's representation, and we've got a lot of it so, I guess it is positive.

**J:** Are you familiarized with the concept of intersectionality?

**INT 1:** Yes, yes, I know!

**J:** What role do you think this concept might play, in regard to queer representation on screen? How important do you think it is and why?

**INT 1:** I think it's very important because, it represents, not only a lot of different types of minorities, very different types of minorities that, sometimes we don't see very often. We don't see people in wheelchairs in tv shows very often, for example, which is kind of weird. Representing a lot of different types of minorities into one specific character is very, very good in the sense that it brings a lot of different layers to a person, you know? One thing is you have a black woman, that's already two minorities there, but imagine if it's a black woman who's queer in a wheelchair? All of a sudden, this character is like, incredibly interesting because, they've lived a life of struggles and they end up growing and turning out to be a very different person than someone who's never had this kind of problems, for example. So, I think representing more people with more intersectionalities is very, very important, because that's people, people's lives, you know? You have a lot of problems in your life, everybody does, you have struggles in your life, everybody does, so I think it's very important to show that. Everybody has a lot of struggles, and intersectionality can fill in that role perfectly. It's very important to notice also that, it's important to show that people that belong to a lot of minorities, or belong to minorities in general, are normal people, with normal lives and they love ordinarily, you know what I mean? Don't focus just on the "Oh, she's black, and everything about her life is about her being black!", "He's gay, everything about his life is about him being gay!", you know? Like, there's a certain part of their lives where they focus on that, but they have something else, they have lives in general, and it's important for them to be like...for the representation to be there, but not everything be about their representation. Sometimes, a quiet representation is a good representation, they just so happen to be in a wheelchair, but that's not important to the story, you know what I mean? That kind of thing. Intersectionality would be perfect for that!

**J:** What type of narratives, characters and ideas relating to queerness, would you like to see explored more on screen? Why?

**INT 1:** More people that are like...we've gone through the whole "I'm struggling to accept my identity!" thing, those characters are out there, they've been explored, we don't need more of those. Those kinds of like, stereotypical, really loud gay people especially, they've already been out there, they've already been exposed to the world, ok, we got it, they've been represented. People that are more quiet about their sexual identity, whatever their sexual identity might be, is also necessary. They just happen to be like this and that's it, it's not something that is just touched upon it, it's briefly mentioned. I'll give an example of Semantic Error: There's the main couple, whatever, one of the friends, the girl, she is just a friend of one of the main characters, and she's there as this sort of adviser of the main character really. She just happens to, very briefly, mention that she's bisexual, very briefly she's like,...it's like a thirty second scene, it just

goes by very easily, very unnoticeable, but it made my whole day when it happened because it's like, she's like this very cool character in the beginning, and she's fun, and you know, that kind of cool girl or whatever, and she already had a personality set for her, and then they were like "Oh, she's bisexual!", and then they just let it go. And that was it, and all of a sudden this character is representing bisexual people, and they didn't even have to try hard, they didn't make a world about bisexuality; she wasn't wearing a rainbow all the time, she wasn't like "Oh, I date women and men!", or like "I'm a whore!", or something like that - which is more traditional for bisexual people -, it was more of this quiet, briefly mentioned thing, it wasn't anything to the main plot or anything it was just a small detail, it was just a small detail that sometimes really, really helps, you know? Like, things like,... I'm talking about sexual orientation here, but you could go as far as talking about how you identify yourself as non-binary, or transexual, or something like that. Would also be very, very useful that if you had one transexual person, character on screen, that just happens to be transexual, and it wasn't a part of the main story. Sometimes, you know, you see this boy, and he's just a boy, and he's just like, a simple character at first, and then, all of a sudden they have to change into something, and you see them change and they have a binder on, and you're like "Oh, they might be transexual!", and then it just passes by, and that's it, and it's not a big part of their thing, like, it exists in their lives but it doesn't define their lives. That sort of quiet representation would be very, very important and to spread it around and to not just be like "the gay friend", we've all seen the gay friend, there's more to it.

**J:** Do you think media representation has a real and tangible effect on marginalized communities and individuals? Why, and how so?

**INT 1:** More and more so, they have. More and more so. Because they have been connecting these people across the community so, I think that, back when the queer representation wasn't a thing in media, it was more of this sort of like, secret society, it was sort of this thing where you had to hide it, it's like, secret clubs, and there's like, suddenly just wearing one wearing could mean something, and it was very secretive, it was very like, you almost had to like hide it, but it's not really hidden. Also like, the groups that you socialize with are very small, and you had a limited choice of who you had or could be open with. Nowadays, I feel like the community can find itself much more easily, because we are more ok with being open about the fact that we're queer, you know? If you see a person on the street that has a queer symbol of some kind, it could be something small, it could be like, they have a pin in their backpack that says "Gay" or "Pride" or whatever, just like "pride" with the rainbow or whatever, all of a sudden you're like, "Oh, right, they belong to the community!". Also, sometimes you just see them being ...it could be anything, I mean I read The Untamed (the book) on the metro, and maybe for your average person, they don't know what that is, but if you're a queer person, you know what that is. All of a sudden it's easier to connect more with people and find more of your people. You just go on Google nowadays and you just google "gay bars", and it shows up so. That kind of thing, you can feel that definitely queer representation has been very, very good, and whether that representation is good or bad, that's debatable, but the representation itself, the fact that it existed, it was very good in the sense that it opened a lot of doors for us, and it made it much easier to be more open about it, and to find people like us as well. As I've said before, if you have friends, or a colleague or whatever, and you find out, or that you're sure that they're queer, there's a whole new channel of communication that you can talk to the other person about, there's a whole new world that you could talk to that person about, and that's because we were able to develop that world and that community. So, the community has grown stronger, definitely has this big community, maybe an outsider community, but it's a big, big community, it's got a lot of power now and that's good.

**J:** Do you think the portrayal of the intersection of queerness and criminality would be, in your opinion, of any value to the LGBTQ+ community?

**INT 1:** Off course it always comes down to how they chose to represent it, because you can have a great idea and be terrible at executing that idea. It's always good to have representation, it's like that saying "Bad publicity is still publicity!". So, representation, even if bad, is still representation, and especially with social media nowadays if there is a really bad representation, let's say there's this gay character that's like, a drug addict, and they keep mentioning the fact that he's gay and a drug addict, and all that there is to the character are those two things. All of a sudden, social media can bounce back and say "This is actually a terrible portrayal of what it is like!", and you can have gay people be like, "This doesn't represent gay people at all!", and you can have drug addicts literally be like "This doesn't represent what dealing with drug addiction is like!". So, even a bad representation can, eventually be very good to open up the discussion, and that will be positive, off course. Intersectionality and crime,... I mean, they exist, in the society, and sometimes, there's a lot of crimes that have been like, very normalized, especially in media. So like,

consuming alcohol underage, or consuming drugs, is extremely normal in the media so having characters that like, go through that, while still encountering intersectionalities, would be very interesting. But there's also the danger of falling into stereotypes I think. So, you can't really like go, "Oh, a transsexual and they're a prostitute?". Like, tell me about what happened in Paris in the 1820's or something, you know, please? They can really go into stereotypes really easily, you know? It can be positive, but it's definitely very dangerous territory, definitely requires a very good producer to be able to produce those kinds of stories without it being absolutely awful. But oh well, it's better to start doing it now, and start it badly and improve, than to never do it at all so.

**J:** Are you familiar with the notion of "the necessity of gay crime"? There's this idea that, often times, queer people, specially those who fall into disadvantaged intersectional points, are pushed by society into lives of crime as outsiders, due to lack of equal opportunities and access. So, I wanted to know what your opinion and stance on this subject is and the context surrounding it?

**INT 1:** I think "necessity of gay crime" makes sense, again, because if you are living your life as an outsider, life isn't easy for you. The likelihood of you getting a good job, if you're seen as an outsider is really, really low. It would take a lot of determination and personal strength to be able to handle that, so you would be pushed into doing things you wouldn't like to do in the first place, I do think that happens. Maybe those stories would work better if they were set some decades ago, if it was something like, back in the 1960's for example, they would've been perfect because that would be the prime example of the necessity of gay crime coming through. Like, it made a lot of sense back then, but nowadays, I don't think you have to like... if you live in a modern city, if it's a big city, you wouldn't be pushed to go so far as to commit crime, I think. You would've felt that being seen as an outsider definitely creates some changes in your life, and some hardships, but you wouldn't necessarily, in today's day, you wouldn't be pushed into going full on committing crimes, or something like that. Even if it's a small crime, you know? I think it would be really, really hard. Something like, for example, being poor might actually be worse, do much worse for your life than being queer, or black, or whatever the kind of minority it is. Specially because, nowadays there's such a thing that law has been trying to do, to try and protect minorities, and even without us noticing it as much, without it having such an impact, such a noticeable impact such as media would, those things still end up protecting us. You know, if you really are for example, discriminated at work because you are of some minority, you can then actually sue them, and that's legally a very, very important power. So, I think that, maybe nowadays, it wouldn't be so harsh, or you'd have to have a very specific context in order to be pushed into actually committing crimes because of being queer. So like, I think, can you still do it? Yeah! Can it still be possible? Absolutely, it can! But not very common nowadays, in today's setting I think it wouldn't be so common.

**J:** Do you think there should be space in media for the exploration of these ideas, of the "necessity of gay crime"? Still in this day and age, since as you said, it's not as much of a problem now. Do you think still, it should be talked about or approached?

**INT 1:** It should always be talked about! Being pushed into committing crimes because of your circumstances is always important to talk about, whether or not they're because of you being queer. There has also been, I feel like, this last decade, a lot of films, a lot of media, that's set in the 1960's, or 50's, or late 1800's, that talk about, and tell these stories of people that are like, different generations. Even though those are important, we learn from history. We're very bad at learning from history, but we do learn from history, a little bit. We also have to talk about the fact that, we're talking about the younger generation, I'm talking about people my age, but there's also people who are like 80 years-old and are gay, and they deserve representation as well! You know, maybe they lived a rough life, being gay in the 1970's and 80's definitely wasn't easy, definitely there was some necessity of gay crime, and they're stories need to be told as well. Maybe today, in a modern setting, would it be easy to represent something like that in media? Probably, not! But, they did exist, and it would be perfectly normal, and it would be very beneficial to represent what was happening at the height of this "necessity of gay crime", what was happening when, in fact, there was a huge surge of queer people in sex work, for example. Those stories are being told, and I think that they should continue to be told because I think they'd be very beneficial to our understanding of the world, and how we came to be. It's important to remind everybody that, this minority, this community has been through a lot, and we are now living and thinking, and having these ideals and morals because this happened in the background, and it's important to notice it happened in the past and really mention that this struggle that, we can't go back to what it was before. That's sort of the thing, with the rise of the far-right politics, is very important to remind us that this is what it was like back then, do you really wanna go back to that? Like, think about it. Maybe it's not that good!

## Appendix 8: Colour Coded Highlights Labeling

Highlight Color	Code
Red	Queerness & Crime
Yellow	Types of Representation/Stereotypes & Common Plotlines
Olive Green	Identity and Community
Bright Green	Background Queerness
Cyan	Ideal Queer Representation
Teal	Expressions of Queerness In Real Life
Blue	Intersectionality
Magenta	Representing Identities/ Identity in Media
Grey	Comparing Queer vs. Straight Representation

## Appendix 8: Example Chart of Content Featuring Queerness and Criminality

Movies	Series
Rope (1948) - USA	The Sopranos (1999) - USA
Strangers on the Train (1951) - USA	American Horror Story (2011 - ongoing) - USA
Psycho (1960) - USA	Hannibal (2013) - USA
The Children's Hour (1961) - USA	Orange is The New Black (2013) - USA
(?) Frenzy (1972) - USA	How to Get Away With Murder (2014) - USA
Female Trouble (1974) - USA	Banana Fish (2018) - Japan
The Devil Queen (1974) - USA	Pose (2018) - USA
Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975) - USA/UK	The Black Butler (2008) - Japan
Dog Day Afternoon (1975) - USA	Little Fires Everywhere (2020) - USA
The Krays (1990) - UK	Breaking Bad/ Better Call Saul (Gustavo Fring) - USA
Paris is Burning (1990) - USA	Barry (2018) - USA
Thelma and Louise (1991) - USA	Mare Fuori (2020 - Ongoing) - Italy
The Living End (1992) - USA	Not me (2022) - Thailand
Fresh Kill (1994) - UK/USA	KinnPorsche (2022) - Thailand
Interview with a Vampire (1994) - USA	The White Lotus (2022) - USA
Lilies (1996) - Canadian/French	Interview With a Vampire (2022 - ongoing) - USA
Bound (1996) - USA	Prisma (2022) - Italy
Chocolate Babies (1996) - USA	Turn of the Tide (Rabo de Peixe) (2023) - Portugal
The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999) - USA	
Burnt Money (2000) - Argentina	
By Hook or By Crook (2001) - USA	
Madame Satã (2002) - Brasil	
Life on Christopher Street (2002) - USA	
Soldier's Girl (2003) - US/Canada	
The Bloodettes (2005) - France/Cameron	
I Love You Phillip Morris (2009) - USA	
My Brother the Devil (2012) - UK/Egypt	
Dallas Buyers Club (2013) - USA	
Legend (2015) - USA	
Moonlight (2016) - USA	
The Handmaiden (2016) - South Korea	
Kajillionaire (2020) - USA	
Bottoms (2023) - USA	
Saltburn (2023) - UK	
Runaway Dolls (2024) - USA	



## Appendix 9: Highlight Code of Appendix 8 Chart

Highlight Code	
Colour	Meaning
	<b>Queer Coded</b> - there's no explicit mention of characters sexuality, however, the queer subtext is heavily present (in some cases prior or posterior adaptations of the work have stated the characters LGBTQAI+ sexual orientation or identity)
	<b>Varied Sexual Identities/Orientations Represented</b> — there's a variety of identities represented within the central plot
	<b>Queer Male Identifying Protagonists or Important Characters</b> — encompassing bisexual or gay men
	<b>Transgender, Non-Binary or Crossdresser Representation</b> — from transgender characters of different orientations, gender non-confirming individuals to Drag Queens
	<b>Queer Female Identifying Protagonists or Important Characters</b> — encompassing bisexual or lesbian women